

LANDLORD SERVICES VOIDS (EMPTY PROPERTY) POLICY



Glossary of Terms

Allocations Policy: The rules the Council uses to decide who is offered a council home.

Asbestos Check: A safety check to make sure any materials containing asbestos (a harmful substance) are identified and managed safely.

Compliance Checks: Important legal safety checks (such as gas, electricity, fire safety, water hygiene) that must be completed before you move in.

Decant: When a tenant has to move out of their home temporarily or permanently, usually so major works can be carried out.

Decent Homes Standard: A national standard that ensures council homes are safe, warm, and in good repair.

Empty Property (Void): A council home that is unoccupied between tenancies.

Empty Property Standard: The Council's standard that sets out the condition a property must meet before being let to a new tenant.

Fit for Human Habitation: A legal requirement meaning a home must be safe, healthy, and suitable to live in.

Gas Safety Check: A legal inspection to ensure all gas appliances are safe to use.

Habitability: Whether a property is suitable and safe for someone to live in.

Relet (Re-let): When a property is rented out again to a new tenant after being empty.

Rent Loss: Money lost by the Council when a property is empty and not generating rent.

Sign-Up (Tenancy Sign-Up): The appointment where you formally agree to take the tenancy and receive your keys.

Stock Condition Data: Information the Council holds about the condition of its homes, used to plan repairs and improvements.

Tenant Responsibilities: Things tenants are expected to do, such as keeping the property in good condition and clearing belongings when leaving.

Vulnerable Tenant: Someone who may need extra support due to age, disability, health, or personal circumstances.

Reasonable Adjustments: Changes or extra support provided to help disabled or vulnerable tenants access housing or services fairly.

Value for Money: Ensuring that money is spent wisely to achieve the best results for residents and the Council.

1. Introduction

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council is committed to the effective management of empty homes (voids) to ensure council housing is safe, secure, well maintained, and relet promptly to households in housing need.

This Voids Policy sets out the Council's principles, responsibilities, and commitments for managing empty properties. It explains what tenants and stakeholders can expect when a council property becomes vacant and before it is relet.

This policy is aligned with the Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy and supports a proactive approach to maintaining and improving council homes through effective void management.

This policy operates in accordance with relevant legislation and regulatory requirements including, but not limited to, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Housing Act 2004, Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, Equality Act 2010, and applicable consumer standards issued by the Regulator of Social Housing."

2. Aims and Objectives

The aims of this policy are to:

- Minimise the length of time properties remain empty and reduce rent loss
- Ensure homes are relet in a safe, clean, and decent condition
- Meet statutory, regulatory, and health and safety requirements
- Deliver value for money across both revenue and capital investment
- Improve tenant experience at the start of a tenancy
- Use void periods to support long-term stock improvement

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All council-owned housing stock managed by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
- All properties that become vacant through tenancy termination, death, eviction, abandonment, or decant
- All staff, contractors, and partners involved in the void management process

This policy sets out expectations which are delivered through supporting operational procedures.

Detailed standards, inspections, specifications, authorisation levels, and workflows are set out separately in the Repairs Procedure Manual and Empty Property Standard.

4. Key Principles

Void management will be delivered in line with the following principles:

4.1 Safety and Compliance

All properties will meet statutory health and safety requirements prior to relet. Required gas, electrical, fire, asbestos, water hygiene, and other compliance checks will be completed, and homes will be fit for human habitation at the start of the tenancy.

4.2 Quality and Decency

Properties will meet the Council's Empty Property Standard at relet. Essential repairs will be completed before sign-up, with some non-essential works undertaken after move-in where appropriate and clearly communicated.

4.3 Timeliness and Efficiency

Homes will be relet as quickly as reasonably possible. A risk-based approach will prioritise works affecting safety and habitability, and major or long-term voids will be managed through structured review.

4.4 Fairness and Transparency

Tenants will receive clear information about property condition and any outstanding works. Decisions will be applied consistently and recorded appropriately, and recharges may be applied where damage or neglect is identified.

5. Void Classification and Performance

To ensure a proportionate, risk-based approach to managing empty homes, void properties will be classified according to the level of work required and associated risk.

5.1 Void Classification

Void properties may be categorised as:

Standard Voids

Properties requiring routine repairs and statutory compliance checks prior to relet.

Major Voids

Properties requiring significant repairs or replacement of key components, such as kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, rewiring, or structural works.

Long-Term or Complex Voids

Properties affected by severe disrepair, damage, health and safety concerns, or other factors requiring extended works, additional approvals, or multi-disciplinary input.

Classification will be informed by property inspection, stock condition data, health and safety requirements, and professional judgement, and will be recorded appropriately.

5.2 Performance Management

The Council will actively monitor void performance to ensure homes are returned to use efficiently while maintaining safety, quality, and value for money.

Performance monitoring will include, but is not limited to:

- Void turnaround times by void type which will be measured against annual Key performance indicator targets
- Rent loss associated with empty properties
- The number and profile of voids across the housing stock
- Reasons for delay where re-let timescales are extended
- Target re-let timescales will be set and reviewed in line with operational capacity and the nature of works required. Where extended timescales are necessary, these will be managed transparently and kept under regular review.

Performance information will be used to identify trends, improve service delivery, inform investment and resource planning, and support effective governance and continuous improvement.

6. Managing the Void Process

The Council will manage the void process in a structured and coordinated way to ensure properties are returned to use as efficiently as possible, while maintaining safety, quality, and value for money. Clear roles, timely inspections, and effective communication between teams are essential to minimising avoidable delay and improving outcomes for incoming tenants.

The void process begins at the point a tenancy ends and continues through inspection, completion of works, and re-letting. Detailed operational arrangements are set out in supporting procedures and standards.

6.1 Ending a Tenancy

Outgoing tenants will be supported to understand their responsibilities when a tenancy ends. This includes providing clear information about the expected condition of the property, arrangements for access, and circumstances where recharges may apply. Early engagement, where possible, will be used to help reduce avoidable works and shorten the void period.

6.2 Inspections

A void inspection will be undertaken to assess the condition of the property and identify required works. Inspections will consider safety, compliance, habitability, and readiness for re-let, and will inform decisions about void classification, investment needs, and likely re-letting timescales.

Inspection processes, authorisation levels, and standards are set out in the Repairs Procedure Manual.

6.3 Works to Void Properties

Works will be undertaken to ensure the property meets the Council's Empty Property Standard and is safe and suitable for occupation. Flexibility may be applied to the Empty Property Standard where appropriate, taking account of the intended use and suitability of the property. Limited planned improvements or component replacements may also be undertaken where justified by property condition, value for money considerations, or the needs of the incoming tenant within reason.

Works may include:

- Repairs and maintenance
- Statutory and regulatory compliance checks
- Cleaning and clearance
- Removal of former tenant belongings
- Planned improvements if required

7. Investment in Council Homes and Active Asset Management

The Council takes an active approach to asset management and recognises void periods as a key opportunity to invest in the long-term condition and performance of its housing stock. Decisions made during void periods can have a significant impact on tenant experience, future maintenance costs, and regulatory compliance.

Void management is closely aligned with the Council's wider asset management and investment strategies.

Void periods provide an opportunity to address underlying property condition, complete major component replacements, reduce future disruption for tenants, and improve long-term asset performance.

7.1 Bringing Forward Planned Investment Works

Where a property becomes void, the Council may consider bringing forward planned investment works where this represents better value for money, improves the condition of the home, and enhances the experience of the incoming tenant.

7.2 Decision-Making and Professional Judgement

Decisions to undertake additional or early investment works will be based on professional judgement and informed by stock condition data, health and safety considerations, value for money, and the impact on the incoming household. Decisions will be made by appropriately authorised officers and recorded in line with governance and financial controls.

7.3 Linking Voids to Long-Term Stock Improvement

Void management will actively support the Council's long-term objectives, including maintaining Decent Homes compliance, improving energy efficiency, supporting decarbonisation ambitions, and reducing repeat voids and early tenancy failure.

8. Letting and Sign-Up

Once a property is ready to let, the Council will aim to minimise delay between completion of works and sign-up. Effective coordination between housing management, repairs, and allocations functions is essential to ensuring homes are let promptly and fairly.

Properties will be allocated in line with the Allocations Policy, taking account of property suitability and household needs.

At sign-up, tenants will be provided with clear and accurate information about:

- The condition of the property
- Any agreed post let works, post-let works will only be undertaken where they do not affect the safety, security, or habitability of the property.
- Landlord and tenant responsibilities

This information is intended to support a positive start to the tenancy and reduce avoidable misunderstandings or early tenancy issues.

9. Major, Long-Term, and Low-Demand Voids

Some properties may require a different approach due to the scale of works required, persistent low demand, or wider strategic considerations. These cases will be managed separately to ensure transparency, effective decision-making, and value for money.

Where properties require significant investment or experience low demand, an options appraisal may be undertaken. This may consider outcomes such as major refurbishment, remodelling, disposal, or alternative use, informed by housing need, asset performance, and financial viability.

Such properties will be monitored and reviewed through appropriate governance arrangements to ensure decisions are robust and aligned with the Council's wider housing objectives.

10. Tenant Feedback and Continuous Improvement

The Council recognises the importance of learning from tenant experience to improve the voids service. Feedback from tenants provides valuable insight into the effectiveness of standards, communication, and processes at the start of a tenancy.

Tenant feedback following relets will be used to:

- Monitor satisfaction
- Identify recurring issues
- Improve standards and communication
- Inform future service development and policy review
- Learning from feedback will be shared across relevant teams and used to drive continuous improvement.

11. Equality, Vulnerability, and Reasonable Adjustments

The Council is committed to providing fair, inclusive, and accessible housing services. Void management will take account of equality, vulnerability, and individual circumstances to ensure properties are suitable and that tenants are supported at the start of their tenancy.

Reasonable adjustments will be considered for disabled or vulnerable households, and adapted properties will be managed in line with the Aids and Adaptations Policy. Where appropriate, additional support will be offered to tenants who may struggle with moving, decoration, or settling into their new home.

This approach supports compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and helps ensure equitable outcomes for all tenants.

12. Accessibility

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council is committed to ensuring that all tenants can access and understand this policy, regardless of disability, language, or communication needs. We will provide the policy and related documents in alternative formats upon request, including but not limited to:

- Large print
- Braille
- Audio format
- Easy-read versions
- Translations into other languages

We will also make reasonable adjustments to support tenants with disabilities in understanding and engaging with tenancy-related processes, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

Staff will be trained to identify and respond to accessibility needs and will offer support or signposting to appropriate services where necessary.

We will provide services fairly and make reasonable adjustments for those who need them (e.g. translation, accessible communication, support for vulnerable residents).

13. Tenant Engagement

We are committed to providing high-quality housing services and welcome feedback to help us improve. If you would like to provide feedback about this policy, any policy, or the service you have received from us, please contact us online at hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/housing or telephone **01455 238 141** and ask for the Service Development Team, or the department you want to speak to.