

Empty Homes Policy

2020 – 2023

Document control

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Responsible Executive Director	Executive Director – Property
Author	Performance Manager
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Version	2

Version	Date of review	Details of review
1	January 2020	Policy reflects the approach approved by EDT following the Empty Homes Project
2	April 2021	New policy format

1. **Introduction**

We are committed to effectively managing the refurbishment and allocation of our homes that become empty in a safe, timely and cost-effective way. This policy aligns to the Asset Strategy objectives, in particular to become the home provider of choice.

2. **Scope**

The implementation and scope of the policy applies and is applicable to:

Livv Housing Group	X
Livv Homes	
Livv Maintenance	X
First Ark Social Investment (Operating as Livv Investment)	
All entities	

3. **Compliance**

The policy is in place in order to support:

Regulatory Compliance, in particular the Decent Homes Standard	X
Legislative Compliance, in particular Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985	X
Best Practice	

The Decent Homes Standard applied to a property requires us to ensure that:

- It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- It is in a reasonable state of repair
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Under Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenants Act 1985, our repairs obligations are as follows:

- To keep in repair the structure and exterior of the dwelling-house (including drains, gutters and external pipes),
- To keep in repair and proper working order the installations in the dwelling-house for the supply of water, gas and electricity and for sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths and sanitary conveniences, but not other fixtures, fittings and appliances for making use of the supply of water, gas or electricity), and
- To keep in repair and proper working order the installations in the dwelling-house for space heating and heating water.

4. **Policy Statement**

We will employ the following actions in relation to key stages of the empty homes process:

Pre-tenancy termination inspections: Will be arranged with tenants when notice is given for a tenancy transfer or termination, so that the property

condition can be assessed, and the tenant advised of their responsibilities before termination.

Rechargeable Repairs: If items of disrepair that a tenant is responsible for are identified during a pre-tenancy termination inspection, the tenant will have the opportunity to address them prior to leaving the property. If items are left for us to rectify, the tenant will be recharged for those items. In the event of a tenant seeking a transfer to another of our properties, we will reserve the right to refuse the transfer if significant items of disrepair are not addressed.

Asbestos Surveys: For properties built prior to 2000, the Asbestos Register will be checked for a valid asbestos survey. Where a survey is not available then a survey will be undertaken to provide a detailed report of any asbestos content within a property prior to any refurbishment works commencing.

Security: A review of security at a property will be undertaken when it becomes empty. Any properties at an increased risk of being targeted by vandalism or theft will have appropriate security measures put in place to protect the asset.

Initial Property Assessment: Full detailed surveys will be undertaken by us to identify any defects or hazards to be addressed to enable the property to be refurbished to our Empty Homes Standard.

Property Appraisals: Prior to authorising refurbishment works, properties will be evaluated in relation to asset performance including financial, social impact, demand and strategic development objectives.

Properties determined to not be a viable investment based on the appraisal will be considered for alternative options such as disposal, re-configuration or inclusion on a planned programme. Any request for a property to take an alternative route will be submitted to Investment Appraisal Panel for approval.

Property Adaptations: We will do everything possible to retain adaptations within properties and market in a way that targets prospective tenants who may benefit from specific adaptations (e.g. level access showers, stair lifts, through-floor lifts etc).

Cleanliness: All properties will be cleared and free from rubbish and debris and will also undergo a full valet clean before re-occupation. All internal cleansable surfaces will be free from mould, dirt and grease and all sanitary ware will be chemically cleaned or renewed as determined.

Planned Programmes: Properties that require component replacement (such as kitchens and bathrooms) may be deferred to a planned programme and replaced within the first 3 months of a new tenancy, unless they are in such a state of disrepair that they need to be replaced before occupation.

Property Refurbishments: All contractors will provide an anticipated completion date and undertake the refurbishment of properties in line with the

survey provided to them by our Empty Homes Surveyors. Where variations to the original survey are identified, a tiered approach to authorisation will be employed to create sufficient controls over expenditure.

The authorisation threshold levels for variations is as follows and refers to the total cost of variations required:

- Up to £300– Property Manager
- £300 - £700 – Empty Homes Surveyor
- Over £700 – Asset Performance Manager

Ongoing analysis of variations will be undertaken to identify trends and the common variations to assist in improving the accuracy of initial property surveys.

Utility supplies: We aim to ensure that gas and electricity supplies are available at the start of tenancy. We will aim to rectify any issues relating to supply to properties, meters or historic utility debt prior to a new tenant moving in. If issues cannot be rectified within a reasonable timescale, we may instead support the tenant with rectifying issues once they have moved in and are the registered bill payer.

Post Refurbishment Surveys: Once the property has been refurbished, a joint inspection will be undertaken by our Empty Homes Surveyor and Property Manager to confirm whether the property can be made available for let. If any additional works are identified at this stage, then they will be agreed along with the timeframes for completion.

There may be works identified that can be completed when the tenant has moved into the property and those works will be agreed with the incoming tenant before the tenancy commences.

Property Allocations: Properties will be allocated in accordance with our Lettings Policy. Applicants will be allowed to view properties during the refurbishment process and again when works are complete.

In line with changes to section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, when the applicant signs the tenancy for their new home, they will be provided with a Welcome Handbook which will include a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate, the latest Landlord Gas Safety Register Certificate Electrical Safety Certificate and the asbestos report summary.

Should applicant(s) reject a property offer, the reasons for this will be collated to provide an insight into any trends that may warrant further action.

Hard to let properties: Properties may be hard to let for a variety of reasons including property types/internal layout, geographic areas or social factors. A range of options will be considered to assist in the timely letting of such properties including:

- Identifying and addressing any barriers to allocation resulting from social and/or environmental factors
- Enhancement of our Empty Homes Standard
- Increasing the marketing routes utilised
- The use of local lettings plans with a view to improving the desirability of properties in addition to driving tenancy sustainability

In some instances, the decision may be taken to facilitate a property disposal if there are any concerns relating to the viability of a property. Any requests to dispose of properties will be assessed at 'Option Appraisal' and submitted to Investment Appraisal Panel for approval.

Health and Safety: All visits, inspections and customer contact will be carried out in accordance with health and safety guidelines and good practice. There are standard risk assessments in place for all of these activities, as well as dynamic risk assessments that can be completed on a case by case basis, to ensure the safety of staff, contractors and customers

Data Protection: The termination of existing tenancies and allocation of new tenancies will be carried out in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

5. Policy Outcomes

Through the implementation of the policy, we expect that we will be able to:

- Provide homes that are aligned to our Empty Homes Standard
- Control costs of refurbishment, rechargeable repair and component replacement through accurate pre-work surveys and effective contract management
- Ensure homes are let in a fair and equitable way
- Minimise the length of time homes are empty and subsequently reduce rent loss levels
- Keep housing related debt to a minimum through effective communication and engagement with tenants throughout their tenancy and prior to its termination
- Promote a positive collaborative culture to ensure empty homes and lettings performance is an integral element of managing business operations

6. Monitoring and Review

Performance is reported to the Group Board, Executive Leadership Team and relevant committees.

The mechanisms for monitoring performance are:

- Empty Homes Notice Tracker
- Power BI (internal business intelligence tool)
- Daily Empty Homes Tracker
- Daily Lettings Tracker
- Daily Empty Homes Summary Report
- Weekly operational cross functional Empty Homes Surgery

- Weekly operational Lettings Surgery involving Lettings Advisors
- Tenant inspections
- Telephone surveys with tenants regarding property and Lettings service satisfaction levels
- Monthly Pentana reporting to board

Furthermore in line with the Group's Policy Framework, this policy is scheduled to be reviewed every 3 years. Unless due to a change in Government legislation or regulatory requirements, then the review period will be brought forward in order to ensure compliance.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

The Policy Framework documents the approval routes for all Policies & Strategies, however under this policy the following teams/employees have the following responsibilities.

Customer Services Committee (CSC)	Responsible for final approval of the policy under the Policy Framework
Executive Director's Team (EDT)	Responsible for initial approval of the policy under the Policy Framework
Director – Assets	Operational implementation of policy
Director – Operations	Operational oversight of works delivery
Performance Manager	Operational oversight of service delivery
Senior Surveyor – Empty Homes	Ensuring properties are let at the required standard

8. Equality & Diversity

In order to comply with the Equality Act 2010, an equality analysis (EA) was completed as part of the policy review. Upon completing the EA it was found that the implementation of the policy would support and encourage the aims of the public sector duty. The equality analysis was completed and approved October 2018