

Abandoned Property Policy

This Abandoned Properties policy outlines Croydon Council's approach to managing abandoned Council properties.

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This Policy sets out Croydon Council's approach to ensuring that properties the council suspects are abandoned are identified, investigated, managed and brought back into use. The aim of this policy to ensure that Croydon makes the best use of its housing stock.

2. Definitions

2.1 **Abandonment**

An abandoned property is a property that the tenant(s) and the household have vacated without providing the due notice, and to which the tenant(s) and the household do not intend to return.

3. Statement of intent

- 3.1 Croydon Council is committed to managing its housing stock effectively and efficiently on behalf of its residents. The council recognises the need to address the demand for properties from households on the housing register and the need to minimise rent loss.
- 3.2 The Council will take a proactive approach to dealing with any properties that appear to have been abandoned so that they can be brought back into use and let to applicants in need.

4. Aims and Objectives

- 4.1 The Policy aims to ensure that suspected abandonments are investigated and managed effectively. The council will:
 - Determine whether a property is abandoned.
 - Minimise the time a property is left unoccupied.
 - Minimise void and rent loss.
 - Reduce illegal occupation of properties.

5. Tenants Absence

- 5.1 Tenants are required to inform the Council if they intend to be absent from the property for more than 21 days as set out in the conditions of tenancy.
- 5.2 The Council recognises that there are circumstances when tenants may have a genuine reason to be absent from a property for more than 21 days. They may be in prison, in hospital, working away, on a long holiday, caring for relatives etc.
- 5.3 In the case of joint tenants, the Council will liaise with the remaining joint tenant.

6. Investigating reports of abandonment

- 6.1 Where the Council has reason to believe that a tenant(s) may not be living in their property as their only or principal home, the housing department will arrange for this to be investigated as an abandonment.
- 6.2 When investigating reports of abandonment, the Council will ensure that it does not prevent tenants from occupying their properties, that investigative actions are justified and will seek to find out whether absent tenants have the intention to return.
- 6.3 The council will comply with its obligations under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977. All cases of suspected abandonment will be thoroughly investigated, and the Council will take account of the individual circumstances of tenant.
- 6.4 The Council will actively seek to support vulnerable people who may have difficulties sustaining a tenancy and, where the tenant is known to be vulnerable, will liaise with the Tenancy Sustainment Service.

Investigations could include :

- Contacting the tenant by all appropriate methods available.
- Checking for mail accumulating at the property.
- Checking for personal belongings at the property.
- Taking gas/electricity meter readings (where possible) to check for usage.
- Consulting with neighbours.
- Contacting any next of kin or emergency contact persons.
- Checking for the last rent payment and repairs reported.
- Liaising with social work, police, hospital to establish if they have had any contact with the tenant(s)
- Establishing if a homeless application has been made.
- Checking if the tenant is still registered for Council Tax

7. Legal Framework

The following legislation and standards apply to this policy.

- Protection from Eviction Act 1977
- Housing Act 1985
- Notices to Quit Regulations 1988
- Torts Interference with Goods) Act 1977
- Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982
- Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
- Social Housing Regulations Act 2023 (Tenancy Standard)

8. Storage of Items

- 8.1 Croydon will take an inventory of Items found to be left in a property following repossession and serve a tort notice on the former tenant providing notice to arrange

collection of the items. Items will be stored for 28 days, after this period they will be sold or disposed of as appropriate.

8.2 Soiled, damaged, or infested items found on the premises will be disposed.

9 Associated Policies

- Tenancy Agreement
- Conditions of Tenancy
- Notice to Quit

10 Performance Management

10.1 Housing/tenancy management is responsible for the implementation and operation of this policy.

11 Reasonable Adjustments

11.1 Croydon Council will make reasonable adjustments to support our residents' needs when they access our services. The term 'reasonable' refers to what we can do without compromising our resources, efficiency, or ability to practically fulfil requests. This does not include [Aids and Adaptations](#) to our properties and common parts of a building.

11.2 No resident should be at a disadvantage when accessing our services. The following statements offer a general overview to ensure that our services are adjusted to meet the needs of our residents where possible. This list is not exhaustive, and we will adapt our approach based on individual resident needs.

11.3 We aim to provide services that are accessible to all who require them. As a result of this, we will:

- Ensure our officers get to know our residents and their individual needs
- Provide a range of ways for residents to contact our officers including phone, mail, email and via [Housing Online](#)
- Provide alternative communication methods on request, such as Braille, foreign language interpreter, large print etc.
- Ensure residents are always able to select their preferred method of contact.
- Ensure our offices are fully accessible to visitors

11.4 We will continue to diversify our services to meet residents' needs where possible.

12 Equalities statement

12.1 Croydon Council is committed to promoting fair and equal access to services and equal opportunities in employment, the procurement of goods, and as a community

leader. The Council's policies, procedures, and day-to-day practices have been established to promote an environment that is free from unlawful and unfair discrimination while valuing the diversity of all people.

- 12.2 Discrimination on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, marital status, sexuality, disability, and age is not acceptable: the Council will take action to ensure no person using Croydon Council's premises or services receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by requirements or conditions that cannot be justified. Croydon Council will tackle inequality, treat all people with dignity and respect, and continue to work to improve services for all service users.
- 12.3 The legal framework for Croydon Council's approach is provided by the Equality Act 2010 and specifically by the Public Sector Equality Duty, under which a public authority must work consciously to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with differing characteristics.
- 12.4 Further detail on the Duty, and Croydon Council's approach to fulfilling its requirements, can be found on our website [Equality and Diversity](#).

13 GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018

- 12.1. Croydon Council's commitment to ensure that the management of its data conforms with legal requirements.

Housing Management recognises the commitment to ensure that all data is:

- Processed lawfully, fairly, and in a transparent manner.
- Collected for a specific and legitimate purpose and not used for anything other than this stated purpose, or as provided for in our privacy and fair processing notices.
- Relevant and limited to whatever the requirements are for which the data is processed.
- Accurate, and where necessary, kept up to date. Any identified inaccuracies will be amended or removed without undue delay.
- stored for as long as required, as specified within Housing Management's Records Retention Policy.
- Secured with appropriate solutions, which protect the data against unauthorised or unlawful processing and accidental loss, destruction, or damage.

Further information about Croydon Council's commitment to the General Data Protection Regulations GDPR can be found on Croydon Council's website. [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\) guidance | Croydon Council](#)

13. Roles and Responsibilities

13.1. Director of Housing Management

- 13.1.1. The Director of Housing Management will have overall responsibility for the implementation of the Abandoned Property Policy.

13.2. Heads of Housing Services

- 13.2.1. The Heads of Housing Services will develop, implement, and monitor the effective management of Abandoned Property management, to ensure Croydon Council delivers an efficient and value-for-money service, by exceeding key performance indicators (KPIs) and financial targets.
- 13.2.2. The Heads of Housing Services will ensure the services comply with all property-related health and safety legislation and regulations and have an up-to-date knowledge of Policy at a national and local level, to inform Croydon Council of any changes. The Abandoned Property Policy and associated procedures are embedded within the operational delivery of abandoned property management, and all staff are aware of their responsibilities and are adequately trained to carry them out

13.3. Council staff and Contractors

- 13.3.1. Will follow the Abandoned Property Policy and related Policies, the associated rules, and procedures, and have an awareness of property-related legislation and regulations to ensure the operational delivery is fair and consistently delivered across our services. Staff and contractors are aware of their roles and responsibilities and regularly carry out mandatory and personal development training offered to them.

14. Consultation

- 14.1. Stakeholders with responsibility and operational knowledge of abandoned properties, have been consulted during the development of this policy.
- 14.2. Residents have also been engaged and consulted in the development and review of the Abandoned Property Policy.

15. Monitoring and Review

- 15.1. This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, or sooner if required by statutory, regulatory, best practice, emerging developments, or circumstances arising from reviews of other Council-wide policies.
- 15.2. Arrangement for a full internal audit of the Abandoned Property process to be undertaken by Croydon Council's Internal Auditors. The full scope of the audit will be agreed upon with the Internal Auditors, Director of Housing Management, and Heads of Service.

16. Document Control

16.1. This is a controlled document and should not be changed unless by authorisation of the policy owner.

Monitoring	
Approved Date:	31 October 2024
Next Review Date:	1 April 2027
Effective date:	1 November 2024
Consultation Review	
Stakeholders review:	09.09.2024
Legal review date:	13.09.2024
Residents reading group:	21.10.2024
Policy owner:	Director of Housing Management
Ratified by:	Housing Directors Management Team
Equality impact assessment:	The impact of this policy will be measured as it is implemented and used as part of a scheduled 1-year implementation compliance review.

Version History		
Version Number	Summary of change	Author
1.0	New Policy	Developed and reviewed with subject matter experts in Housing and Residents Reading Group