

CROYDON COUNCIL



Void Management Policy

The policy outlines Croydon Council's approach to managing all empty properties within its stock

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1. Purpose of Policy

- 1.1. The effective management and swift turnaround of properties when they become vacant (void) is a key priority for Croydon Council. This policy sets out Croydon Council's approach to managing empty homes we own, so that it meets our lettable standard (see Appendices 1) and finding a suitable new tenant for the dwelling.

Voids may arise due to:

- formal termination of a tenancy
- abandonment of a tenancy
- tenant transferring to another tenancy
- eviction of the tenancy
- the tenant's death.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aims of this policy are to:

- Manage void properties to ensure an efficient and customer focused service, as set out within Croydon Council's lettable standard.
- Minimising void rent loss and maximising rental income by achieving target turnaround times.
- Align with Croydon Council's Allocation policy to ensure that the stock is used in a way that meets local lettings needs in a fair and equitable way.
- Have regard to the impact that void turnaround times have on those in housing need, as well as the costs incurred by the Council in using temporary accommodation.
- Comply with statutory requirements when letting the property.
- Ensure that properties are let safely and securely and to Croydon Council's lettable standard.
- Demonstrate a strategic approach to letting properties that are deemed "hard to let".
- Set out a clear approach as to the rights and responsibilities that tenants have in respect of their new homes.
- To continually improve the service by monitoring the performance in void turnaround time and tenant satisfaction with their new home

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy sets out Croydon Council's policy towards the management of void properties and minimising the time a property is void.
- 3.2. It covers the following types of stock held within the Housing Revenue Account:
 - General needs
 - Extra Care and Sheltered Accommodation

- Temporary Accommodation
- 3.3. Voids may arise due to a formal termination of a tenancy, abandonment of a tenancy, the tenant transferring to another tenancy, eviction of the tenant or the tenant's death.
- 3.4. This Policy, together with Tenancy or licence agreements will guide staff in ensuring that tenants are aware of their repair responsibilities and end of tenancy obligations.

4. Legal Framework

This Policy will ensure compliance with the following standards and legislation and promote good practice.

- Localism Act 2011
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Construction Design and Management Regulations (CDM 2015)
- 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.
- The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- The Housing Act 2004
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Regulator for Social Housing: Consumer Standards
- Regulator for Social Housing: Decent Homes Standards (under review)
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System 2006
- Equalities Act 2010
- The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

5. Associated Policies

- Allocations Policy
- Repairs Policy
- Re-charges policy
- Tenant Compensation Scheme
- Tenancy abandonment policy
- Corporate Complaints Policy
- Tenant and Leaseholder Home Improvements policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy

6. Responsibilities

6.1. Croydon Council responsibilities - The Lettable Standard

- 6.1.1. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that properties meet or exceed our defined Letting Standards developed in consultation with tenants, with the objective of meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

- 6.1.2. **Our Lettable Standard** - see Appendix 1 which sets out the standards we aim to meet to ensure that our properties are safe, clean, and secure.
- 6.1.3. Where a property has a history of damp and mould problems, we will seek to pre-empt future problems by ensuring that existing ventilation and insulation are adequate and if necessary, by improving the heating system.
- 6.1.4. Existing disabled adaptations will be left in place, and where possible the allocations team will be notified to find an applicant with similar needs.
- 6.1.5. Properties offered in Extra Care or Sheltered Accommodation will be decorated.

6.2. Tenant responsibilities

- 6.2.1. The Lettable standard sets out Croydon Council's commitment to tenants in terms of meeting the Decent Homes standard. Tenants also have the following responsibilities when they are both beginning or ending their tenancy.
- 6.2.2. When beginning the tenancy.
 - The tenant is expected to use every endeavour to move in on the start date of the tenancy.
 - The tenant is responsible for rent from the start date of the tenancy.
 - If a tenant is in temporary accommodation, they must give vacant possession on the same day as the tenancy start date.

6.3. Ending the Tenancy

- 6.3.1. The tenant must give the Council 4 weeks' notice unless this is an internal transfer, which is 1 weeks' notice. If less notice is given rent may be chargeable for the full 4-week period, as set out in their Tenancy agreement.
- 6.3.2. A tenant must pay all rent owed up to the end of the tenancy
- 6.3.3. A tenant must provide the Council access to carry out a property inspection before leaving their property.
 - During an Inspection the tenant will be informed that any unauthorised alterations or Improvements to the property must be removed, and the property left in a safe condition.
 - Only where a tenant has sought and gained the landlord's permission for an improvement in advance of installation will the above condition not apply. Further information can be found in the Tenant and Leaseholder Home Improvements Policy.
 - In all other cases, a recharge will be applied to make good, as set out in the Repairs Policy, unless the tenant is advised during the Inspection that any damage must be addressed before they move out.

The tenant will also receive a letter following the inspection advising them that if the repairs are not carried out a recharge will apply.

6.4. When leaving the tenancy

- The property and its fixtures and fittings must be left in a clean and reasonable condition allowing for general wear and tear. We may recover the reasonable cost of any cleaning, rubbish removal, repairs, or redecoration.
- The property must be cleared of all belongings, furniture, or rubbish, including carpets, floor coverings, and blinds unless these items have been provided by the Council. This includes items left in the shed, scooter store, and garden.
- Ensure all windows are left locked and secure, and secure any rear garden access.
- The tenant must cancel any milk, or paper deliveries, and arrange for the disconnection of any phone lines.
- Notify the Post Office of a change of address and arrange for mail to be redirected to their new home.
- Contact the gas and electricity suppliers to ensure that the supplies are shut off and a final meter reading is taken.
- Ensure when removing any gas cooker or fire that the supply is properly capped off by a professional Gas Safe approved gas fitter.
- Gas or electric cookers or appliances provided by the council must not be removed at the end of the tenancy.
- Ensure that any plumbed-in washing machine or dish washer is safely capped off so that no water leak occurs and shut down and drain off the water supply by turning the stopcocks shut and then running off any water left in the immersion/storage tank via the bath or sink taps.
- If the tenant leaves any perishable items, we will dispose of them without further notice.
- All items left in the property will be stored for up to 28 days unless the tenant has given the Council permission to dispose of the items. We will notify the tenant of items to be stored at the tenant's last known address. If the items are not collected within four weeks, we will dispose of them, and the tenant will be responsible for meeting all reasonable removal and/or storage charges. The costs may be deducted from any sale proceeds and any remaining costs will remain the tenant's liability.
- In the case of an internal transfer, if there is significant damage or uncorrected improvements to the existing tenancy and a recharge is

applicable, payment must be made before the tenant moves into their new property.

- All keys and fobs to the property must be returned to the Council, should tenants fail to return the keys the tenant will be liable for either the reasonable costs incurred by the Council for replacing the locks and keys to the property, or securing the property to enable it to be re-let or rented for every day or week that the keys are not returned, which is the lesser amount.
- A forwarding address should be provided if the tenant ceases to be a council tenant
- Croydon Council reserves the right to withdraw any prospective offer of accommodation.
- The Council will seek to apply a recharge for the clearance of items in storage.

6.5. Ending the tenancy.

6.5.1. Termination where 4 weeks' notice is given.

6.5.2. Following the return of the keys and or fobs a lock change on the front and back doors should be completed to ensure that the property is secure. An inspection should take place within 48 hours of the property becoming vacant.

6.5.3. During the visit, any necessary repairs and damage will be noted and then ordered. Additionally, any improvements made by the tenant will be identified (for them to rectify) as soon as possible. Tenants will be clearly told of their responsibilities as set out in Section 6.2

6.5.4. The property will be voided on the system using the correct tenancy end date.

6.5.5. When the property is cleared a full Post-termination Inspection will be completed and a completed list of outstanding works set out. The visit will identify whether a pre-clean or other works is required to allow prospective tenants to view.

6.5.6. Where insufficient notice has been received and the keys are handed in the outgoing tenant will be charged rent for the full 28-day period.

7. Death of a Tenant

7.1.1. If a tenant dies and there is no succession (grant of the tenancy to another qualifying person) Croydon Council will issue a 28-day notice of possession served on the public trustee. This will apply from the Monday after the tenant's death. If there is a next of kin, they will be contacted and advised of the process to end the tenancy.

7.1.2. The items of the deceased should be removed from the property prior to the end of the 28-day notice by the next of kin. The next of kin will be liable for any delays in the return of keys which extend the period beyond the 4-week period.

7.1.3. If the property is under probate the Notice to Quit will also be served on the Executor of the deceased tenant's estate. If the period exceeds the end date of the notice, then the rent due will be claimed against the estate.

8. Abandonment and Eviction

8.1.1. Where there is evidence or information that suggests that a property has been abandoned but no notice of termination has been received, this will be investigated by the tenancy service.

8.1.2. The Officer will carry out checks which may include:

- Speaking with neighbours.
- Getting in touch with any contacts/or next of kin.
- Liaising with relevant departments regarding rent, housing benefits, and council tax payments.
- Check whether the property has furniture

8.1.3. If there is sufficient evidence that the property is abandoned, repossession action should begin as set out in the tenancy Abandonment Policy.

8.1.4. The voids team will be pre-notified of the void and once the Court Order is obtained and a warrant of execution carried out a post-inspection will occur within 24/48 hours of the repossession date.

8.1.5. If an eviction occurs (when a property is repossessed through Court action), the same process outlined in 8.3.4 will apply.

9. Void property resulting from a decant process

9.1. These are properties where residents must be moved temporarily or permanently due to demolition, redevelopment, disrepair, or planned works to a dwelling. Such a situation may be planned or require action on an emergency basis so that the proposed works cannot take place with the resident in situ. This is outlined in the Decants policy.

9.2. If the properties are due for demolition the following will still apply.

- Priority will be given to secure the void to avoid squatting that might blight the regeneration area.
- The tenant will remain responsible for removing all possessions to avoid additional removal costs for the Council.
- If there is no intention to utilise the property for temporary accommodation whilst demolition is awaited, tenants will not be expected to make good disrepair or home improvements.
- Those who have made home improvements will be compensated through home loss and relocation payments.

10. Void works

- 10.1. When the tenancy is at an end, a visit by a Voids Surveyor will be carried out and the condition of the property will be assessed against the Lettable Standard (Appendices 1)
- 10.2. The condition of the void will be categorised in line with the definitions set out in Section 17.
- If a property is a **ready-let or involves minor works** - All essential works will be completed whilst the property is empty. In certain cases, some work may be completed after the new tenant has moved into the property.
 - If the property requires **Major work** i.e., it does not meet the definition of a decent home, work will take place to ensure it meets the minimum standard.
 - If the property is a **Capital Works void**, and involves significant refurbishment, a decision will be made as to the most cost-effective use against the principles set in the Asset Management policy.
 - Work that will put health and safety at risk, such as the removal of asbestos, and damp treatments will always be completed when the property is empty and prior to the start of the new tenancy.
 - All voids will be issued with electrical and gas safety certificates and an EPC in compliance with our legal requirements.
 - All void properties will also have an asbestos survey carried out in line with the Asbestos Management Plan (AMP). Where either Amosite or Crocidolite is identified or any damaged asbestos of any kind, removal will be arranged as required.
 - In accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating Systems (HHSRS) contained within the Housing Act 2004, the property should be free from “any deficiency that might give rise to a hazard which interferes with or puts at risk the health or safety or even the lives of the occupants.”
 - On completion of the works a further inspection will take place to ensure the property meets the Lettable Standard. Any unsatisfactory works will be rectified.

11. Allocations

- 11.1. The process of selecting a new tenant for a property will begin as soon as possible after notice is received from the outgoing tenant. The Letting Service will be notified about the void and informed of the likely availability date following void works.
- 11.2. Available properties will be advertised through Croydon Choice, the Council’s choice-based lettings service. Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the Croydon council’s priorities set out in the **Allocation Policy**.
- 11.3. In some circumstances (such as a property with adaptations or where there are management reasons) the Council may make a direct offer to a tenant meaning it will not be available through Croydon Choice.

11.4. Where a property is 'hard to let' and has been refused on numerous occasions, the Council can take the following action to improve its prospects of being let:

- Carry out improvements to the property such as redecorations or in some circumstances upgrade the kitchen.
- Let to a lower priority case or consider a direct let to a locally based tenant.

12. Performance Management and Standards

12.1. All key stage performance information will be monitored and evaluated by the Director of Housing Management to ensure the service is delivered efficiently and effectively to help drive management standards, ensure value for money by reducing costs, and improve efficiency and satisfaction levels.

12.2. We will measure our performance by tracking the rent loss of an empty home, the total cost of repairs, and the satisfaction and feedback of customers moving into empty properties. In doing so, we will monitor and report on the following on a monthly and annual basis.

12.3. We will measure and monitor the following areas of performance:

- Monthly void loss
- Void rent loss (as a % of annual rent due)
- Number of voids let monthly.
- Voids as a % of total stock
- Actual and average void turnaround
- The total repairs costs of the void works -total and average
- The amount of time a property remains empty.
- The satisfaction of tenants moving into the property
- The time taken to let a property.
- The percentage of properties pre-allocated.
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with the standard of their home when moving in and their overall experience of our service.

13. Reasonable Adjustments

13.1 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.

13.2 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.

13.3 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

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

14. Equalities Statement

14.1. 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.

14.2. 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.

14.3. 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.

14.4. Further detail on the Duty, and Croydon Council's approach to fulfilling its requirements, can be found on our website.

15. Complaints

15.1. Should there be a complaint from a tenant concerning, any aspect of the void works, this will be dealt with via the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

16. GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018

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](#)

17. Definitions

- *Void* - An empty property caused by the ending of a tenancy.
- *Minor Work Voids* - Properties that require minor works only, with some being carried out whilst a tenant is in occupation.
- *Major works* - Requires significant works to meet the Decent Homes Standard
- *Capital Works voids* - Properties requiring re-configuration, significant works, and/or are unsuitable to let or held vacant for decant and/or regeneration/refurbishment projects.
- *Ready to let* - Property that is ready to be re-let with few if any repairs.
- *Lettable standard* - Outlines the standards that prospective tenants can expect in their new home.
- *Decent Homes Standard* - Void works will be carried out in accordance with the Decent Homes Standards, Croydon Council recognises that the standard is currently been reviewed.

18. Roles and Responsibilities to implement the policy

18.1. Director of Housing Management

The Director of Housing Management will have overall responsibility for the implementation of the Voids policy.

18.2. Heads of Housing Services

The Heads of Housing Services will develop, implement, and monitor the effective management of Void management, including appropriate management of repairs contracts and service level agreements with partnering contractors, to ensure Croydon Council delivers an efficient and value-for-money service, by exceeding key performance indicators (KPI's) and financial targets. This will be achieved by ensuring voids are re-let on time and that our stock is maintained to the highest possible standard to meet our tenant's needs.

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 Voids policy and associated procedures are embedded within the operational delivery of voids management, and all staff are aware of their responsibilities and are adequately trained to carry them out

18.3. Council staff and Contractors

Will follow the Voids Management 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.

19. Consultation

- 19.1. Stakeholders with responsibility and operational knowledge of Voids Management, have been consulted during the development of this policy.
- 19.2. Residents have also been engaged and consulted in the development and review of the Voids Management Policy.

20. Monitoring and Review

- 20.1. 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.
- 20.2. Arrangement for a full internal audit of the Void 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.

21. Document Control

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

Monitoring	
Approved Date:	16 September 2024
Next Review Date:	01 April 2027
Effective date:	23 September 2024
Consultation Review	
Stakeholders review:	13.03.2024
Legal review date:	22.03.2024
Residents reading group:	April 2024
Policy owner:	Director of Housing Management

Ratified by:	Housing DMT on 16 Spetember 2024	
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

Appendices 1- Lettable Standards

Before a tenant moves into one of our properties, we will check to ensure that their new home is in good condition which means that it is safe, clean and in good state of repair. The minimum acceptable condition of an empty property before you move in, is what we refer to as the 'lettable standard'.

This lettable standard has been developed together with some of our existing tenants and the Resident's Scrutiny Panel, to let our new tenants know what standards they can expect from us when moving into one of our empty properties.

We recommend that tenants use the lettable standard leaflet as a checklist for their new home. Not all areas of this guide may be applicable to the property they are moving into.

Utilities

Gas checks

- A full gas check/service of appliances will be carried out by a Gas Safe registered engineer. We will provide you with a copy of the Landlord Gas Safety Record (LSGR).
- Carbon Monoxide detectors will be provided.
- Following the tenancy sign-up, an appointment will be booked to commission the gas system and inform the tenant as to how the system controls operate.
- their lettings officer will tell them how to make an appointment for this to be done

Electric checks

- All electrical fittings will be tested to comply with the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) standards.
- Safety certificates will be held by us and provided at sign-up.
- All wiring, fuse boards, sockets, switches, heaters, and light fittings will be in good working order.
- Low-energy light bulbs will be fitted.

Plumbing and water supplies

- Plumbing and water systems will be tested to ensure they are in good working order and free of leaks and blockages.
- Water tanks and water supply are checked for legionella where needed. Taps and stopcocks should turn easily.
- Stopcocks will be labelled, and information will be left in the property to advise of their location.

Asbestos

- The property will be checked for asbestos during the void period. Any damaged asbestos will be removed.

Kitchen

We will ensure that:

- The kitchen units are clean and in good condition.
- There are three courses of wall tiles above the work surfaces, and sealant around the top of base units so the area can be kept clean.
- There is tiling behind the cooker area from the skirting board or floor up to three tiles above the cooker so the area can easily be kept clean.
- The sink is clean and in good condition. There is a plug and chain.
- All kitchens have two double electric plug sockets and a sealed light fitting.
- Kitchens will be fitted with humidity-controlled extractor fans which will assist with extracting water vapour.

Bathroom

We will ensure that:

- There is a bath or shower, a wash hand basin, and a toilet.
- The bath and sink each have a plug and chain.
- Part of the areas above the bath and wash hand basin are tiled and waterproof to keep the area dry and easy to clean.
- The bathroom is fitted with a suitable lock that can be used from the inside.
- The bathroom is fitted with a humidity-controlled extractor fan which helps extract water vapour (to prevent condensation leading to dampness and mould).
- Toilet seats are new and well-fitted, pans are free from cracks, and cisterns are easy to flush.
- Shower curtains are fitted in showers that require one.
- There is non-slip flooring in the bathroom.
- Bathrooms meet the 'Decent Homes' standard – the government's minimum expected standard.

Internal - Interior, doors, windows, stairs, and keys

We will ensure that:

- The property is free from graffiti, large cracks, loose plaster, holes, pests, damp and mould.
- Front doors are fitted with a working cylinder rim lock, one 5-lever mortice lock and a spy hole or chain.
- Back doors are fitted with one 3-lever mortice lock with a door number.
- Internal doors are clean, secure, and easy to open and close. Hinges, handles and latches are in working order.
- Windows are working properly; easy to open and close, have good hinges, and fit properly to reduce drafts.
- Window restrictors are fitted to all windows above the ground floor.
- All stairs, stair nosing, and bannisters are in good condition. All woodwork is vertical so it can't be climbed on.
- All staircases have at least one handrail. Stair treads are fixed properly and are not damaged.
- There are three sets of keys to your front door along with any window keys and other communal area keys.
- Lofts are insulated to meet the minimum depth installation. Lofts are also clear and free from pests, damp and mould.

External – garden, fences, roofs, and gutters

We will ensure that:

- The surroundings are neat and well-kept. There are no overgrown shrubs, grass, trees, and/or hedges.
- The garden is neat and any bin sheds, coal stores, and sheds are tidy.
- All fences are in good working condition and meet the following requirements:
 - Other than the front entrance fence, any fence adjoining a public highway should be a 1.8m high close-boarded fence.
 - Front entrance boundaries should be a privet hedge or a 1m high fence like others in the road. There will be a fence in place for the rest of the boundary.
 - Any fence adjoining a neighbouring garden should have 1 panel of 1.8m high close-boarded fence next to the house, and 1m elsewhere.

- External gates will be in good working order including catches and locks.
- Roofs, guttering, and downpipes are clean and in good condition.
- External windows are secured with working catches or locks. If window locks are fitted, keys will be provided.
- The render and brickwork are clean and in good condition.
- Boarding at the gutter level (fascia, soffits, and bargeboards) is in good condition.