

Empty Homes Policy



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1 Introduction & Aim

Cobalt Housing is committed to ensuring the management of our empty homes is delivered in line with our Statutory & regulatory requirements. Cobalt Housing acknowledges that the efficient & effective management of our empty homes is a high priority for our tenants and residents and must be delivered cohesively within the Operations Department to ensure we deliver a high-quality service.

2 Policy Statement

The Empty Homes Policy applies to all of Cobalt's residential housing stock upon termination of a tenancy and is empty for a period of time. The intention of the Policy is to minimise the financial loss of rental income, making best use of our assets and to increase customer satisfaction with their home & neighbourhood in order to sustain tenancies.

3 Policy Principles

The Tenancy Standard & Homes Standard of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England (April 2012) requires registered providers to:

Tenancy Standard

- let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way demonstrating how their lettings:
 - make best use of available housing.
 - contribute to local authorities strategic housing function and sustainable communities.
- minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting.

Homes Standard

- ensure that tenants' homes meet the Government's Decent Homes standard (June 2006)
- provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time.
- meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes.

In order to achieve the above, detailed below are the key policy principles for managing empty homes.

Best use of stock

As part of our approach to the management of empty homes we will ensure that high-cost empty homes are reviewed as part of our active asset management & value for money approach. This will allow us to determine the most appropriate action to ensure that our assets are viable and fit for the future.

Allocations

Cobalt Housing are a scheme partner of the Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings scheme known as Property Pool Plus (PPP). PPP is a common allocations scheme which seeks to ensure that social housing is allocated fairly and objectively to those most in need. This is supported by Cobalt's Allocations Policy which is approved by the Local Authority which sets out Cobalt's responsibilities and approach to the allocation of available properties we own and manage in order to sustain tenancies and our Neighborhood's.

Consideration must be given to those applicants who are not immediately able to take up their new tenancy due to a disability, both physical disabilities and poor mental health should be considered. Cobalt aims to provide a service to its customers where their needs are considered, and a different approach taken if needed. This element of the policy will be delivered on a case-by-case basis and in conjunction with internal team's support to the new tenant into their homes in a timely manner based on their individual circumstances.

Rechargeable Repairs

Cobalt Housing must ensure that its resources for repairs and maintenance are maximised and may therefore charge former tenants for the completion of repairs that are considered to be the 'tenants' responsibility'. In addition, tenants may be charged for repairs to the property which have been caused by either unauthorised alterations, willful or accidental damage. We will use the appropriate National Housing Federations 'Schedule of Rates' as a guide for the cost of rechargeable repairs.

Repairs to Empty Homes

Empty homes will be pre & post inspected and repaired in accordance with Cobalt Housing's Lettable Standard, to ensure that properties offered for letting are of a consistent standard. Cobalt will only re-let empty homes once they have reached this standard, which will ensure that properties are ready for occupation, eliminating all health & safety risks, are clean and meet the needs of incoming tenants.

Cobalt will also monitor the number of follow up repairs raised for newly tenanted homes within a specific timescale which is outlined in the Lettable Standard to ensure all repairs completed when the property was empty were completed right first time. This includes all compliance requirements and certification as required by governing legislation.

Relet times

To minimise loss of rental income on empty homes Cobalt will undertake repairs in accordance with Empty Homes Priorities. A comprehensive list of priority timescales is outlined within the Lettable Standard.

Satisfaction

Cobalt Housing will monitor satisfaction levels of new tenants in relation to the standard of service they received during the empty homes process including their satisfaction with the home, neighbourhood & customer care.

Any dissatisfaction will be followed up and investigated by the appropriate Manager to identify the root cause of the complaint and to implement preventative measures where necessary.

4 Risk Management

The key risk associated with non-delivery of this Policy is:

Risk Register Ref: FV 10	Risk:
Poor management of empty homes and tenancy turnover	Poor Management of empty homes results in poor relet times, void costs and rent losses which increase beyond the levels assumed in the approved business plan. Non- compliant homes (safety)
Risk Consequences:	Management and Mitigation:
Breach of landlord regulatory standards Financial loss including Void Rent loss. Poor VFM Reputational damage – Peers & stakeholders Customer complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Internal review of processes and procedures- KPI performance targets- Performance management reporting tools- Financial performance monitoring- Contractor performance monitoring- Tenant satisfaction feedback- Continuous improvement & benchmarking

Key Risk Indicators and Control Limits

Detailed below are the key performance measures in respect of the management of Empty Homes. Further information regarding the definition of the KPI's can be made available upon request:

- Total Qualifying relets.
- Actual Relet Time
- CORE Relet Time
- Time in Management (1 & 2)
- Time in Maintenance
- Void Turnaround Time
- Void rent loss
- New Tenant satisfaction with the Home
- New Tenant satisfaction with the Neighbourhood
- New Tenant satisfaction with the Allocations Service
- Overall satisfaction with customer care

5 Regulatory & Legislative Compliance

Landlord & Tenant Act 1985

Housing Act 2004

HCA – The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012

Health & Safety at Work Act 1974

Housing Health & Safety Rating System 2006
The Construction, Design & Management Regulations 2015
Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016
Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulation 2018
Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

6 Links to Other Key Documents

- Cobalt's Responsive Repairs Policy
- Cobalt's Allocations Policy
- Lettable Standard

7 Governance of this Policy

Equality and Diversity	An EQIA has been completed, it has been noted that further EQIA reviews and consultation will be undertaken in relation to the associated policies and standards such as the recharge policy and lettable standard to provide assurance of a fair and transparent approach.
Financial and Links to VfM	Business plan provision is made available for the management of Empty Homes to ensure all necessary repairs are undertaken in a timely manner.
Privacy and Data Protection	All contractors involved in the management of Empty Homes have confirmed they are GDPR compliant to account for the transfer of information being submitted via electronic job tickets to facilitate repairs to empty homes.
Health and Safety	Failure to implement this Policy carries significant risk in terms of health and safety for its tenants, staff and contractors and embedding the policy will ensure Cobalt assets are safe & fit for habitation.
Development and Consultation	The policy is required to ensure Cobalt meets The Home & Tenant Standard of the regulatory framework for social housing and provides a cost-effective service for maintaining empty homes. Key managers from Neighbourhoods and Property Department have been consulted throughout the Policy review and their feedback has been incorporated within the document. The Tenant Consultative Panel have reviewed the policy prior to its approval and recommendations have been adopted in the final version.
Customer Profiles and Accessing Services Data	Customer demand, exit surveys, tenant satisfaction data and relet performance are all used to ensure the policy is fit for purpose and meets current service requirements.
Monitoring and Review	Performance monitoring of Empty Homes will be reported on a monthly basis to Cobalt's Executive Management Team & Bi Monthly to Board of Management.
Roles & Responsibility	The Head of Asset Management is responsible to the Director of Operations for ensuring the effective implementation of this policy.

8. Definitions

Active Asset Management	A process to base future investment decisions relating to the performance of Cobalt's assets.
CORE	Continuous Recording is a national information source that records a wide range of data on both the household and property each time a letting or sale is made by Private Registered Providers, Local Authorities, and social housing tenants.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
Lettable Standard	A definition of the standard of works & timescales in which work will be undertaken within an empty home
Local Lettings Plan	To manage risk in the allocation of properties, particularly around the sustainability of communities.

