

Housing Management Voids and Lettings Policy

July 2024



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out how the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) Housing Management Services provide high quality homes for tenants by delivering a sustainable lettings approach and efficient void management service.
- 1.2 For the purpose of this policy, a void is an empty property which is due to be re-let.
- 1.3 This policy outlines RBKC's commitment to improve the quality of properties let to tenants by ensuring void property standards are met through a clear and transparent process.
- 1.4 This policy frames RBKC's approach to letting all Housing Management properties excluding Grenfell Housing Service properties.
- 1.5 This policy seeks to allocate void properties/homes that are designed to meet specific needs of tenants in a way that is compatible with the purpose of the housing.
- 1.6 This policy covers the management of our void process from when an existing tenancy ends to the re-letting of the property, including information on the allocation of RBKC Housing Management properties.
- 1.7 The purpose of this policy is to:
 - Ensure void properties are refurbished and ready to let for new tenants in line with target times and value for money targets.
 - Ensure new tenants are allocated properties that meet their needs and that they have a good start in their new homes and feel comfortable in managing their home.
 - Ensure that Housing Management staff are accountable and take ownership for their roles and responsibilities throughout the voids and lettings process.

2. Related Documents

- Voids and Lettings Procedure
- Voids and Lettings Standard
- Gas Safety Policy
- Electrical Safety Policy
- Asbestos Policy
- Repairs Policy
- RBKC Allocations Scheme
- Sign-Up Procedure
- RBKC Tenancy Agreement
- RBKC Tenancy Policy
- RBKC Management Transfer Policy
- Decants Policy
- Decants Procedure
- Recharge Policy

- Key Worker Policy
- HM Parking Policy
- HM Complaints Policy

3. Legal Context

3.1 This policy will ensure full compliance with relevant legislation, regulatory requirements and best practice around voids and lettings management.

3.2 This policy adheres to the following legislation and guidance:

- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Gas Safety Regulations 1998
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Relevant allocations guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Policy Statement

3.3 RBKC Housing Management (HM) will minimise void and rent loss on empty properties by following our voids procedure, to ensure that void properties are re-let in line with Housing Management performance indicators.

3.4 The Voids and Lettings Team will ensure void properties meet the respective HM Voids and Lettings Standard.

3.5 RBKC Housing Management will work with the Allocations Team to advertise and allocate properties in accordance with the RBKC Allocations Scheme, to create sustainable tenancies within local community.

4. Tenants ending their tenancy.

4.1 The Neighbourhood Team will ensure the void process begins promptly by notifying tenants of their exiting responsibilities before their tenancy end date, via a pre-void inspection.

4.2 We will also advise of any potential recharges if there has been any damage or alterations to the property which has not been rectified.

4.3 RBKC recognises tenants' circumstances change over time which may result in under/over occupation or a property not meeting the needs of the household. RBKC will liaise with tenants and provide advice on how we may be able to match their housing needs to a more suitable property.

4.4 Tenants vacating homes must provide the property keys to the Neighbourhoods Team by Monday 12pm (Mid-day) or they would be charged for the whole following week.

4.5 Tenants must provide four weeks' notice before they vacate their property. Otherwise, we will retrospectively charge four weeks' rent.

5. What is provided in new properties (Voids Standards)

5.1 For different types of tenures, we provide alternative standards of voids works depending on different needs. Below are the different types of tenures and what is provided during the voids works.

5.2 **General Needs** – We do not provide any provisions for flooring, or white goods.

5.3 **Temporary Accommodation** – Carpets, blinds, white goods (only fridge, freezer, and electric cooker). We would review cases on a case-by-case basis.

5.4 **Hostels** – RBKC would provide vinyl flooring and curtains.

5.5 **Sheltered Housing** - Vinyl flooring, electric appliances, wet room (level access shower and shower seat – walk in), handyman service (support measure provided by RBKC Repairs team)

5.6 **Burgess Fields (extra care)** – Vinyl flooring, electric appliances and cooker, wet room (level access shower and shower seat – walk in), and lockable medicine cabinet.

5.7 **Assisted Living** – Appropriate flooring, bed, sofa, blinds, white goods (electric cooker, washing machine and fridge freezer), study desk, chairs and handyman service (support measure provided by RBKC Repairs team).

5.8 **New Builds** – provisions are put in place on a case-by-case basis which is provided by the Building Contractor (Home Builder)

5.9 **Key Worker** - Carpets, blinds, white goods (appliances), and electric cooker.

5.10 **Care Leavers** - Carpets, blinds, white goods (appliances), electric cooker, and handyman service (support measure provided by RBKC Repairs team).

5.11 After the tenancy end date, when the property becomes void, RBKC Housing Management will take legal action against any unauthorised occupant, to ensure the property is available for the new tenancy. We may also recharge if items have been left in the property, that we then need to arrange a property clearance for.

6. Works on empty properties (Void Works)

6.1 The Voids Team will minimise the re-let time on properties by undertaking repairs within strict target timescales, ensuring value for money, and ensuring properties are safe, secure, and ready for new tenants.

6.2 The Voids Team will conduct inspections during and after the void work period, to ensure works are completed to a satisfactory standard.

- 6.3 The Voids Team will ensure all properties are compliant (i.e. gas and electrical safety checks) and all compliance information is recorded on our systems.
- 6.4 The Voids Team will identify any existing asbestos in properties, by consulting the Asbestos register before any work starts and take appropriate action to ensure the property is safe for new tenants.
- 6.5 The Voids Team will carry out an inspection based on the Housing Health and Safety Rating, following void work completion.
- 6.6 The Voids Team will ensure that void flats are provided with interlinked smoke and heat alarms.
- 6.7 New build properties will be managed under the home builder warranty within the first 12 months, before it would be passed to RBKC who would manage via our repairs service.
- 6.8 The Fire Safety Team will ensure that the flat entrance door meets the standard for an FD30S. The Fire Safety Surveyor will undertake an assessment to understand whether it meets the legal requirement.
- 6.9 The Fire Safety Team will ensure that void flats are adequately fire-stopped. This will include any necessary compartmentation upgrades identified as necessary in fire risk assessments.

7. Letting RBKC Homes

- 7.1 The Lettings Team / Neighbourhood Team will conduct property viewings and will work closely with the Allocations Team to ensure fair shortlisting and verification.
- 7.2 The Allocations Team will advertise properties through RBKC's Choice-Based Lettings scheme, including any properties suitable for the Accessible Housing Register.
- 7.3 The Allocations Team will make direct offers to applicants where appropriate.
- 7.4 The Allocations Team will ensure Housing Management properties offered to applicants are suitable for the household's needs, including accessibility needs.
- 7.5 Where appropriate, RBKC may let properties through Local Lettings plans, management transfers and/or mutual arrangements with other local authorities and housing providers.
- 7.6 If an applicant provides incorrect or out of date information, RBKC reserves the right to question or withdraw the offer.
- 7.7 All tenancies offered by RBKC will start on a Monday, if a prospective tenant were to accept an offer on a Tuesday, their tenancy would start on the following Monday.
- 7.8 RBKC reserve the right to suspend and take legal action against applicants found to have falsified their application.

7.9 RBKC do not provide parking permits for new developments due to permit-free restrictions. Blue/Purple badge holders would be exempt from these restrictions. For more information about blue/purple badge, refer to HM Parking Policy

7.10 **Choice Based Lettings**

7.10.1 RBKC will provide suitable property offers to applicants. If they refuse two suitable property offers, their housing application may lose priority in relation to suitable properties. More information is available in the Allocations Scheme.

7.11 **Direct Offer**

7.11.1 RBKC will provide one suitable property offer to applicants. If this offer is refused, RBKC reserves the right to allocate the property to another applicant. More information is available in the Allocations Scheme.

7.12 RBKC will ensure all decisions made on appeals from applicants are reviewed and processed in a clear, fair, and transparent manner. Reviews would be conducted by the Housing Needs Review Team.

7.13 **Sensitive Lets**

7.13.1 In some instances, an empty home will have to be let sensitively to address/counter a neighbourhood or social problem, such as criminal activity or anti-social behaviour. As much suitable information as possible about the reasons should be recorded on the vacant property form.

8. **Our commitments to New Tenants**

8.1 When applicants are signing their new tenancy, Neighbourhood Services Coordinators will provide property information and advise new tenants of their rights and responsibilities, as outlined in the tenancy agreement. The new tenants will be obliged to maintain and replace any non-standard items in the property.

8.2 The Rent Income Team will support new tenants by advising when and how to pay rent and may provide benefit advice or a referral to our internal Financial Inclusion team for income maximisation advice.

8.3 Neighbourhood Services Coordinators will further support new tenants, by carrying out an initial tenancy visit 6 weeks after they sign their tenancy agreement.

8.4 RBKC help support new tenants sustain their tenancy. This includes signposting them to relevant organisations which could provide tailored support such as vouchers for white goods.

9. Tenant Obligations

- 9.1 Tenants should familiarise themselves with the conditions of the tenancy agreement.
- 9.2 Tenants are responsible for paying rent regularly and on time and submitting any benefit applications, where required.
- 9.3 Tenants are responsible for following up on instructions to uncap their gas supply with Customer Services, once they have moved in. Except in the case of Sheltered Housing, where tenants are not responsible for this as the gas will remain capped.
- 9.4 Outgoing tenants are responsible for leaving the property in good condition, removing all possessions and furniture from the property, and returning all keys to RBKC Housing Management, on or before 12pm on their tenancy end date, to avoid potential recharges.
- 9.5 Tenants must provide four weeks' notice when vacating their property.

10. Carpet Scheme

- 10.1 We've introduced a new scheme in collaboration with a local small business to support our new tenants in carpet installation of their homes. Through this scheme, tenants have the opportunity to choose the carpet of their choice, with the council covering the upfront cost of providing and installing it.
- 10.2 The total cost will then be repaid by tenants through weekly instalments as part of their rent for the first 5 years of their tenancy, with 0% interest. This cost is not eligible for those who receive Housing benefit or universal credit, and so residents are expected to pay this back themselves.
- 10.3 This initiative aims to make settling into new homes easier and more affordable for our tenants. It is designed to help combat fuel poverty and noise nuisances, helping our residents sustain their tenancies.

11. Identifying accessible properties

- 11.1 RBKC will seek to maximise the supply of Housing Management accessible properties to make them available for applicants with disabilities, where possible.
- 11.2 When properties are made available, we will check to see if there are any existing accessibility adaptations, and whether the property is suitable for any applicants on the Accessible Housing Register, before removing any existing adaptations.
- 11.3 The Voids Team will work with Allocations and Lettings to identify properties suitable for the Council's Accessible Housing Register by monitoring and identifying properties with existing accessibility adaptations. Occupational Therapists would make the assessment whether the Aid or Adaptation is suitable on a case-by-case basis.

11.4 We will also look into whether the property is suitable to have adaptations made to it (e.g. wide doorframes/room sizes, level access etc.).

12. Reporting and Monitoring

12.1 The performance of our Voids and Lettings Teams will be monitored and discussed at the Voids Weekly Meetings

12.2 The Performance Team will send satisfaction surveys to new tenants and report on these regularly. Survey outcomes will be reviewed to help inform any service improvements.

12.3 The Allocations Team will monitor HM/customer refusals and priority status.

12.4 RBKC Housing Management will investigate delays and complaints in relation to void works.

13. Outstanding Repairs.

13.1 Those wishing to report an outstanding repair in relation to Voids Works, should contact their lettings officer with as much detail as possible regarding the works, or contact HM Customer Services who would raise the repair.

13.2 Any repairs reported within the first 12 weeks from their tenancy start date will be addressed by the Voids and Lettings Team. Any repairs after this timeframe will be treated as a standard repair. (Refer to HM Repairs Policy)

14. Reviews

14.1 Those wishing to have a review of their direct offer in cases where it may be unsuitable for their needs, should contact the Housing Review Team (housingreviews@rbkc.gov.uk or 020 7361 3008) with as much detail as possible regarding the offer and how it does not meet their needs. This appeal should be made within 21 days of receiving the offer. For further information refer to allocations scheme

14.2 If the resident is unhappy with the service received, then they may raise a complaint under RBKC Housing Management's complaints process.

15. Equalities Statement

15.1 The 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 which is free from unlawful and unfair discrimination, while valuing the diversity of all people.

15.2 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 the council's premises or services receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by requirements or conditions that cannot be justified. The Council will tackle inequality, treat all people with dignity and respect and continue to work to improve services for all service users.

16. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018

16.1 As a directorate of RBKC, Housing Management shares 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 RBKC's Records Retention policy.
- Secured with appropriate solutions, which protect the data against unauthorised or unlawful processing and accidental loss, destruction, or damage.

16.2 For further information about the Council's commitment to GDPR, please see the Council's website at www.rbkc.gov.uk.

17. Compliance, Monitoring and Review

17.1 We will measure and monitor our performance against our key performance indicators and will make changes and improvements to the service where required.

17.2 The overall responsibility for the approval of this policy sits with the Housing Management Directorate.

17.3 The effective implementation and continued compliance of this policy will be the responsibility of the Assistant Director of Resident Services. They will be responsible for checking that officers are taking appropriate action in accordance with the policy.

17.4 The Head of Voids and Lettings will be responsible for reviewing this policy.

17.5 This policy will be reviewed in conjunction with the procedure every 5 years, or when legislative or regulatory changes take place that could affect it. The next review will take place by: **July 2029**