

Golden Lane Housing



Empty Homes Policy

Date: July 2024

Empty Homes Policy

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Located here: -

<S:\GLH\GLH document library\Policy Processes Procedures Strategies\Property\Assets\Asset Team Procedures>

1. What is the purpose of this Policy?

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the Golden Lane Housing's position on the management of Empty Homes and our approach to managing empty properties to meet tenant expectations, regulatory and statutory requirements.
- 1.2 The turnover of housing stock is an integral part of social housing provision that inevitably results in periods where properties are empty (Void). Effective management of empty homes and the limitation of void periods is vital to maximise rental income, provide a quality service, and meet housing need.

Definition: A property is classed as an empty home when there is no current tenancy. The (void) period is the time between one tenancy ending and a new tenancy commencing. Whilst a property is void, no rental income is being received for it.

- 1.3 A detailed procedure for each service area accompanies this policy, clearly setting out the steps to be followed at each stage in the void management process, and by whom.
- 1.4 This Empty Homes Policy applies to all property owned, Leased, or managed by Golden Lane Housing.

2. Policy Details

2.1 Policy Overview

Golden Lane Housing is committed to ensuring a fast, efficient, and effective re-let process for Empty Homes.

Through the managing empty homes process we will limit the rental loss by minimising the time that the property is unoccupied. We aim to ensure that our re-let properties meet our minimum empty homes standard and have clear time deadlines to ensure that the necessary works required for an empty home are completed. By detailing the types and scope of the empty homes work required we will endeavour to meet these deadlines.

Empty Homes management activity covers several related activities. These include.

- tenancy termination
- property inspections
- identifying rechargeable works and other tenant responsibilities
- ordering and supervising repair work
- Seeking referrals and nominations
- Tenancy offers and sign up.

- 2.1.1 Delivering a strong and effective Empty Homes Management service is integral to Golden Lane Housing providing a strong performing housing provision. This Policy includes a range of housing and maintenance functions. These include.

- Empty Homes Standard

- Allocations & Lettings Policy
- Repairs & Maintenance – Void standards
- Compliance Standards
- Tenancy sustainment

2.1.2 A detailed procedure for each service area accompanies this policy, clearly setting out the steps to be followed at each stage in the void management process, and by whom.

- Empty Homes minimum standards
- Compliance Standards
- Empty Homes – Housing management process

2.2 Policy Objectives

The specific objectives of this policy are.

- Ensuring that properties allocated by GLH meet acceptable standards.
- Ensure that rent loss through vacant housing is minimised
- Minimise void repair costs, rechargeable repairs costs, and former tenant arrears, through clear and effective communication with tenants and a process of early inspection.
- Ensure that GLH makes the most effective use of its housing resources.
- Ensure that properties are re-let appropriately and a timely decision for marketing the property is made should no demand be available.

2.3 Golden Lane Housing's Approach to Empty Homes

2.3.1 End of tenancy – An empty home can occur for several reasons:

- Formal termination - where a tenant or their representative gives formal written notice.
- Death of tenant – where a tenant dies and there is no successor to the tenancy.
- Transfer – where a tenant moves to another Association owned property.
- Abandonment – where a tenant has abandoned a property without notice.

Eviction – where the Association has completed court action and obtained authority to evict a tenant.

A detailed procedure for ending a tenancy accompanies this policy, clearly setting out the steps to be followed at each stage in the void management process, and by whom.

The end of tenancy responsibilities is delivered by the housing team under operational procedures.

Refer to the GLH Eviction Policy and Procedures for more information.

2.3.4 **New Properties** - New properties can also be classed as an empty home if they are handed over to the Housing Service by the Development team and are ready to let but are not let to tenants immediately. There may also be occurrences of None –Lettable periods where new properties

(purchased or contract started) are in development works and unavailable to let. Refer to the Definitions guidance for more information on this.

- 2.3.5 **Allocations** To meet the aims and objectives of this policy, empty Homes must be let in as short a timescale as possible. There can often be factors outside the GLH's control, which adversely affect the effectiveness of the allocations process, for example, areas or properties which are low demand.
- 2.3.6 It is important, therefore, that GLH exercises control and minimises allocations timescales where it can, for example through seeking referrals and best practice in collaborative working with Local Authority Commissioners to fill empty homes and working in line with the **Allocations & Lettings Policy and Empty Home Procedure**.
- 2.3.7 Properties will be let in accordance with the Allocations & Lettings procedure. When notification has been received of an empty home or potential arising empty home, the process of identifying a new tenant for the property will begin immediately. To aid the allocation process and avoid any unnecessary delay.
- 2.3.8 The start date for the new tenancy will be set for as soon as possible after the termination date of the previous tenancy but will be subject to following the A&L Policy & Procedure. Also subject to meeting GLH Empty Home minimum repairs and compliance standards.
- 2.3.9 The Empty Homes management procedure details the specific stages, timescales, and lines of responsibility in the allocations process.
- 2.3.10 **Difficult to let/low demand properties** - Individual properties, types of property, whole developments, or geographical areas can be difficult to let for a variety of reasons, such as the physical condition or layout of a property, or wider environmental or social factors.
- 2.3.11 GLH will consider various options and address the issue of low demand or difficult to let properties. Examples of trying to combat the problem, for example:
- enhancement of minimum lettable standard, for example full redecoration or provision of carpeting.
 - local initiatives and partnership working.
 - individual and local advertising.
 - Carrying out adaptations to properties
 - Assessing the viability of the property for reconfiguration or disposal of the asset
 - Assessing the viability of Private general needs short term let
- 2.3.12 GLH will continue to monitor low demand properties, and the effectiveness of any strategies in place. It will also aim to establish any patterns, which could inform future development and provision.

2.4 Inspection and Security

- 2.4.1 **Maintenance / Repairs Inspections** will be carried out by GLH Property Surveyor on all empty or terminated properties in line with GLH Empty Homes procedures and Modern Homes Standard
- 2.4.2 Properties will only be re-let if they meet the appropriate GLH minimum lettable standard.
- 2.4.3 During an inspection it will be determined whether there are any repairs required due to accidental or wilful damage, neglect, or vandalism, by a tenant or tenant's visitor. Such repairs will be completed by GLH but recharged to the tenant. The Rechargeable Repairs Procedure provides detail on this.
- 2.4.4 Gas and electrical checks, Void "Off" works are carried out after the property is vacated and keys returned. The new tenant will be provided with an energy performance certificate, Electrical Inspection Condition Report (EICR) and the latest CP12 Gas Safety Check (if applicable). The

accompanying Empty Homes Procedures detail the specific stages, timescales, and lines of responsibility in the inspection and repairs process, including those for longer term voids.

2.4.5 The Inspections, empty homes standards and repairs works will be delivered in line with the accompanying Empty Homes procedure and minimum lettable standards definition.

2.4.6 **Health and safety** - All inspections of empty homes or terminated properties and accompanied viewings, pre and post termination, will be carried out in accordance with good practice and health and safety guidelines.

GLH property team will ensure that all Empty Homes are to a safe standard as defined in the Modern Homes Standard and Empty Homes procedure.

2.5 Partnership Working

Effective empty homes management requires partnership working between internal service areas and external working partners. The effective approach is based on key principles to ensure engagement and collaboration both internally and externally.

- Targets and time frames for delivery – Performance management
- Inform and involve the right people at the right time
- Minimise delays.
- Establish clear responsibilities and actions.
- Balance Low level voids against other business objective
- Remain Focused on VFM
- Monitoring and review at all levels

External partnership working for our specialist support housing provision will involve in addition to our tenants / applicants.

- Local Authority Commissioners
- Social Care Service professional
- Families
- Support Providers
- Other legal and appointed representatives

GLH will ensure all Policy, processes and KPI's, or performance management support and aligns with this policy and effective empty homes management principles.

2.6 Approach to Incident Escalation

The Director of Housing and the Director of Property & Sustainability will through KPI review, financial budgets and other mechanisms take accountability for the delivery and compliance of this policy to enable effective void management.

Any breach or non-compliance under this Policy or any supporting policy and procedure will be escalated to the appropriate level and will be recorded on the GLH Incident form and investigated by the Building Safety Business Partner. The outcome of the breach investigation could result in disciplinary action.

2.7 Internal Reporting

Monthly Leadership reporting will be provided through the Management Information Tool, on empty homes, bed spaces, and empty homes works costs and time frames. This will include our void loss Key Performance Indicators for lettable bed spaces. Reporting will also include non-lettable bed spaces to ensure full knowledge is held of all types of voids.

In addition to this regular report, audits will take place to ensure compliance. This reporting mechanism will also support review of void management, trends, or challenges to be addressed and inform void management Policy and Process.

- Supporting this Policy is the definitions set out to manage the data in respect of void reporting.

2.8 External Reporting

Empty Homes (Void) reporting is required by the Regulator of Social Housing in the NROSH returns and the data used will meet those definitions.

The statutory accounts require a note of the value of void losses incurred and this will comply with the Housing SORP.

GLH is part of a benchmarking network for KPI's and will ensure that the definitions required are reported to accurately to allow for correct comparisons. This also feeds into the Value for Money reporting.

2.9 Compliance Obligations

GLH has a full Building Safety & Compliance Policy and management plans that supports this Empty Homes Policy, the aims of that policy should be adhered to and referenced as required.

The aim of the Building Safety & Compliance Policy is to determine Golden Lane Housing's (GLH) approach to maintain legal and regulatory Compliance, to:

- Keep tenants safe by maintaining legal and regulatory compliance, as a minimum standard and achieving sector best practice, where possible, and to
- protect GLH, its staff and Board from prosecution.

This Policy provides a summary of the GLH Building Safety Compliance requirements, which should be read in conjunction with this document to provide fuller details.

The following areas are addressed:

- Asbestos Management
- Electrical Safety
- Fire Safety
- Gas Safety
- Water Safety Hygiene
- Specialist equipment e.g., stair lifts, passenger lifts, hoists etc.

Golden Lane Housing Quality and Assurance and Property & Sustainability teams will ensure that through this Policy and all supporting procedures that every empty home is made safe, maintained to the minimum lettable standard, and made available let to meeting our safety standards.

2.10 Obligations to Tenants/ Customers

Working with our tenants and stakeholders to identify ways to reduce voids and Empty homes is integral to delivery of this Policy and best practice within GLH. We will share performance information with them, including steps taken to fill empty homes on an annual basis.

Actions to support tenant engagement and tenant inclusion: -

- Use customer insight and feedback data to inform decision making, Policy and processes.
- Consult Tenants about their homes.
- Consult Tenants about the void management Process.
- Consult applicants and referrers on the Allocations and Lettings Policy and procedures.
- Consult all stakeholders on Service standards (Voids – property standards)
- Support Choices for tenants and Applicants – Informed choices about where they live to gain greater personal investment in their homes.

Golden Lane Housing, Property and Housing service will; through the above tenant consultation & insight use this information to support, influence and drive our actions and ability to meet Tenants expectations and satisfaction. This will be embedded in the wider GLH customer satisfaction objectives and strategy and integral to ensuring service standards are met.

2.11 Equality and Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 and the supporting regulations consolidate and replace the discrimination legislation that was previously in place. For the first time, the Act brings together all the legal requirements on equality that the private, public and voluntary sectors need to follow. The Act protects people from discrimination based on certain protected characteristics for example: age, race, disability, religion or belief etc. All employers and those who provide goods, facilities, or services to the public (including the provision of social housing) have responsibilities under the Act.

Golden Lane housing will ensure that all legal and regulatory requirements of Equality and Diversity are met under this Policy and in all supporting Policy and strategies in place within the organisation.

2.12 Roles and Responsibilities

Golden Lane Housing will ensure that all staff responsibilities in relation to the empty home's procedures are clear.

The Director of Property & Sustainability and Director of Housing Services will be responsible for managing the overall performance of empty homes management.

The Housing and Property & Sustainability Teams will be responsible for co-ordinating the whole empty homes management procedure and will ensure that all empty property times are kept to a minimum via ownership of the process from customer exit to new customer.

The property team will be responsible for providing all compliance paperwork associated with the property, together with a completed and signed Empty Homes Checklist

The Development Team will be responsible for minimising and monitoring all empty homes occurring in New Development properties until occupied. The Development Team will be responsible for instructing and monitoring of development work in line with the Development new scheme development process.

The Finance Team Will be responsible for the financial calculations on empty homes for internal and external requirements.

The Income Team will be responsible for the accurate and timely creation of rent accounts and asset rents for all Empty homes in line with Income process and Procedures. Supporting this is the Income, Empty Homes process and procedures.

The Housing Team will be responsible for the delivery of ending tenancies and new tenancy issue in line with Housing, Empty Homes management processes.

Empty Homes property management links with Allocations and Lettings, housing management and property maintenance. GLH will ensure that we do not have conflicting objectives for service areas, and that action to deal with Empty homes, is co-ordinated so that all service areas in the organisation are working to common goals and business objectives under agreed Policy, processes, and procedures.

2.13 Monitoring and Review

Golden Lane housing needs to keep a close eye on VFM, ensuring empty home works provide maximum value for money for the business.

GLH needs to ensure the best possible prices for works, monitoring the empty homes works costing against tenant satisfaction levels and gaining discounts from contractors.

- This is supported by GLH Procurement Policy and Empty Homes works processes, Customer Satisfaction feedback and service standards.

3. Legislative Guidelines

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Social Housing Regulation Bill 2023
- The Housing Act 2004
- RSH Regulatory Framework

4. Links to Golden Lane Housing’s Corporate and Strategic Objectives

- Tenant Satisfaction – Improving services and communication, increasing tenant satisfaction.
- Investing in Homes – Good quality, safe, environmentally friendly homes.
- Housing More People – New quality supported housing across more diverse communities.
- Strong Finances – Best use of our money and resources
- Working Together – Involving our tenants, great place to work, influencing housing and welfare policy.

This Policy directly supports our above strategic objectives and strategy to provide quality supported housing across more diverse communities, through a robust and fit for purpose approach to managing our Empty Homes and ensuring they are fit for let.

Ensuring a quick turnaround to an agreed standard reduces income loss from Empty Homes and ensuring best use of our money and resources in reducing void periods and void repair costs.

MONITORING, APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
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Copy available from	Keith Henderson – Head of Property and Sustainability



Golden Lane Housing

Empty Homes Procedure

Date: July 2024

1. What is the purpose of this Procedure?

- 1.1 This procedure has been created to support the Golden Lane Housing (GLH) Empty Homes Policy. Its purpose is to set out the GLH position regarding property management of Empty Homes and our approach to managing empty properties in order to meet tenant expectations, regulatory and statutory requirements.

2. Procedure

No.	Description
1	<p>The Voids and Allocation Officer receives notice (Via Housing Officer) on the tenancy and raises a new task on CRM to assetsinbox@glh.org.uk This task is delegated to the relevant Property Surveyor by the Senior Property Surveyor / Head of Property and Sustainability. The Property Surveyor will then record all progress via CRM completing all the relevant actions.</p> <p>The Property & Sustainability Team and Housing Team will follow the Empty Homes Procedure Table (Appendix 1)</p> <p>The Property Surveyor instructs the void contractor to attend the property to fit a key safe for access. This is to be fitted 3 weeks into the 4-week notice period. A spare key or key copy will be put inside the key safe ready for access when the property becomes unoccupied.</p> <p>In event of the property hand back the Voids and Allocation Officer receives notice on the tenancy and raises a new task on CRM to propertyservices@glh.org.uk. This task is delegated to the relevant Property Surveyor in Development by the Property Services Advisor. The Property Surveyor in Development will then record all progress via CRM completing all the relevant actions.</p> <p>In the event of a full void property, the Allocations and Void team will log details of this through a Void Energy Portal</p>
2	<p>Property Surveyor is to arrange for key safe to be fitted and obtain key safe code / safe location and update Active: H. with this information.</p>
3	<p>The Property Surveyor will carry out a property survey and start to build the specification of work required. They will also obtain a photos including a photo of the front of the property and upload to Active H, ready for marketing at a later stage.</p>

4	<p>Property Surveyor sends Request for Compliance checks to propertyservices@glh.org.uk requesting the following to be completed on day one of void.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test and turn off to be carried out with a LGSR issued as confirmation of gas supply capped off. • Isolate water at stop tap and in winter months drain down heating and cold-water supply. <p>Contractor to provide this information within 2 working days of completion to the propertyservices@glh.org.uk who will notify the Property Surveyor. The Property Surveyor will then upload documentation to Shared Drive (SharePoint). Quality & Assurance Officers will then be able to access this at the point.</p>								
5	<p>Property Surveyor will review information from the stock condition data to assess whether any attributes can be included for improvements whilst the property is empty. Where the void is part of a full property will then it goes through a viability and options appraisal process agreed by Head of Property and Sustainability and include advice by the housing team to establish if property is suitable for investment.</p>								
6	<p>Property Surveyor liaises with Voids and Allocations Officer regarding potential or active referral and adaptations required that are above the Empty Home Standard. The Property Surveyor will refer to the Adaptations policy and ensure that any recommendations are referred by an Occupational Therapist Assessment of the individual. Any referral assessment information received after the property work has been completed will be considered separately to the original work specification and should not impact agreed KPI's or turnaround times.</p>								
7	<p>The Property Surveyor produces final specification and scope of works encompassing GLH Empty Home Standard and/or investment works. They will ensure the property has the appropriate fire door and smoke detection standards. Any minor or major adaptations required in the case of an active referral will be included within the scope of works.</p> <p>The void contractor is given the following timescales for returning completed empty home:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="432 1805 1225 2040"> <thead> <tr> <th>Property Type</th> <th>No. of Calendar Days</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Room Void</td> <td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Full Void</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Major Works Void</td> <td>60</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Property Type	No. of Calendar Days	Room Void	21	Full Void	28	Major Works Void	60
Property Type	No. of Calendar Days								
Room Void	21								
Full Void	28								
Major Works Void	60								

	<p>Property Surveyor instructs void contractor directly using agreed framework rate template. Any variations found by the void contractor will need to be approved by the Property Surveyor via email instruction.</p>
8	<p>The void contractor is to commence work upon receipt of the works order and deliver works within the timescales identified above.</p> <p>The Property Surveyor will complete all void tasks and insert relevant documentation to the shared drive (SharePoint)</p> <p>Allocation and Voids Officer notify Void Energy Supplier of any Full Void Property via the Void Portal. Property Surveyors upload details as required to void portal upon completion of void survey.</p>
9	<p>The Property Surveyor project manages the void work through to completion advising of any changes in completion date to the Allocations and Voids Officer.</p>
10	<p>At work completion stage the void contractor provides the Property Surveyor with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs of the completed property • Utility meter readings • Completed Lettable Standard checklist. • Electrical Installation Certificate – Completed as part of Major Works • Landlord Gas Safety Record – Completed as part of Major Works • EPC Certification <p>The Property Surveyor will upload Gas and Electric safety certificates supplied by Void Contractor during Major Works being undertaken to shared drive (SharePoint). The Property Surveyor will save the completed lettable standard checklist to the property folder in the shared drive to demonstrate that GLH are satisfied that the property meets the lettable standard.</p> <p>The Property Surveyor will post inspect all voids, either photographically or by site visit. The Asset team will hold 6 weekly performance meetings with the void contractor(s) to ensure quality and standards are maintained.</p> <p>A Housing Vacancies Report is run on a weekly basis ensuring that the Property Surveyors have included all handover information and is correct and up to date. They will also ensure that the Empty Homes Procedure Table (Appendix 1) has been followed throughout the process.</p> <p>The Property Surveyor ensures any building elements that were upgraded during the project are updated on Active:H.</p>

	<p>Properties deemed as long-term voids are identified in the Allocations and Lettings Policy. Quality & Assurance Team remain responsible for annual compliance certificate in conjunction with the Property Surveyor.</p>
11	<p>At point of completion of property works the Property Surveyor will ensure that all works are completed, and the following is provided to the Allocations and Voids Officer via the property folders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Lettable Standard Checklist signed by Void Contractor and Property Surveyor for completion of works, this includes gas, water and electric meter readings. • A Landlord Gas Safety Record certificate with gas being left capped off with certification. – Supplied by Quality & Assurance Team • An Electrical Installation Certificate – Supplied by Quality & Assurance Team • An EPC Cert (in date) – Supplied by Property Surveyors
12	<p>At point of new referral at 30 days+. The Property Surveyor sends Request for Quality & Assurance Services form to propertyservices@glh.org.uk requesting the following to be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property Surveyor to arrange drain down of system as required. • Once a new tenant is identified the Allocation and Voids Officer will check the necessary documentation is present in the property file • If documentation is not present, the Allocation and Voids Officer will chase the Property Surveyor • If documentation is present, the Allocation and Voids Officer will liaise with Quality & Assurance Officer to confirm the certificate is still valid. • The Property Surveyor will order the turn on and test for gas through Property Services copying Quality & Assurance Officer in who can advise if a new LGSR is required and ensure it is completed within 3 working days of tenancy start date. • The Property Surveyor will liaise with the Quality & Assurance Officer / Property Services to ensure electrics are turned back on and a new EICR is undertaken (if required), and all paperwork saved to the property file. • The Allocation and Voids Officer to liaise with Property Surveyor if adaptations are required as part of the new tenancy. • Once all legal compliance has been received and reviewed the Allocation and Voids Officer will proceed in letting the property.

3. Ownership of this procedure

Procedure Lead	Keith Henderson
Line Manager	Melissa O'Donnell
Team	Property and Sustainability

MONITORING, APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
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Copy available from	Keith Henderson – Head of Property and Sustainability

Appendix A
EMPTY HOMES PROCEDURE - TABLE

	TASKS	OWNER
PRE-VOID STAGE	VOID TASK RAISED ON ACTIVE H (sent to Assets Inbox)	A&V
	VOID TASK RECEIVED AND ACTIONED BY PS	PS
	ORDER KEY SAFE	PS
	CARRY OUT PRE-VOID VISIT	PS
	ORDER GAS CAP THROUGH PROPERTY SERVICES	PS
	CHECK PROPERTY ATTRIBUTES	PS
	PREPARE SPEC AND SEND TO CONTRACTOR	PS
VOID STAGE	WORKS ORDER REQUESTED AND RAISED TO CONTRACTOR	PS/PSA
	WORK COMMENCES IMMEDIATELY	PS
	WORK SCHEDULE AND COMPLETION DATE DATA ACTIONED VIA TASKS ON ACTIVE: H	PS
	NOTIFY VOID ENERGY SUPPLIER OF METER READS	PS
	ON COMPLETION (FOLLOWING DATA SAVED IN PROPERTY FOLDERS) -PHOTOS -METER READS -LETTABLE STANDARD CHECKLIST	PS
	NOTIFY A&V – HANDOVER – COMPLETE VOID TASK	PS

	UPDATE ACTIVE H ATTRIBUTES	PS
REFERRAL	REQUEST COMPLIANCE CERTS (As Required)	PS

Key	
PS	Property Surveyor
A&V	Allocations and Void Officer
PSA	Property Services Administrator