

Empty “Void” Homes Policy

Pinnacle Group



Introduction

Pinnacle Group aim to provide and manage good quality and affordable homes that meet local needs. We recognise the need to ensure competent management of empty homes and limiting times where homes are empty to meet this purpose.

We recognise that there are different ways in which a property may become empty, such as through:

- Abandonment
- Death of a resident
- Decants
- Eviction
- Formal Termination
- Management Transfers

This policy sets out the principles through which we will meet our commitments to managing our empty homes (void properties) to comply with relevant regulatory and legislative requirements and provide a customer focused service.

Key definitions

Properties that are empty will be categorised into either a ‘minor void’ or a ‘major void’, depending on the work needed to bring it in line with our minimum lettable standard:

Minor void – all properties, regardless of costs of void works, which do not require any major works, or component replacements.

Major void – all other void properties requiring major works, and/or replacement of major components, such as: kitchens, bathroom, windows or heating/boiler replacements.

Our approach

This policy takes account of the contractual obligations within the tenancy agreement for both of us as a managing agent, our residents and clients.

Pre-termination inspection

When we receive notification that one of our tenancies is ending, we will arrange for an initial inspection of the property prior to the current resident vacating the property.

This inspection is to decipher the general condition of the property and advise the current resident of any work that may be needed to be done prior to ending the tenancy. It is the resident’s responsibility to ensure that the property is returned in a suitable condition.

We may recharge for any work required due to damage or neglect by the resident, in these cases this will be clearly communicated.

In cases where the property has become empty due to the death of a resident and there is no succession or probate has not been required, ending of the tenancy will follow our tenancy management procedure.

We recognise that the loss of a family member or friend is a difficult and sensitive period, however, extra time to clear the property cannot be given past the expiry date of the notice on the public trustee, except for exceptional circumstances.

A pre-termination inspection within the notice period will be completed as in the case of a formal termination.

Minimum lettable standard (all voids)

When the property is vacated, it will be inspected, and all statutory repairs will be carried out as well as any repairs needed to bring the property in line with our minimum lettable standard – see appendix 1 for details.

Enhanced improvement works (major voids)

In meeting our minimum letting standard, we will also carry out enhanced improvement works, if deemed required. This could be due to requiring major works or needing to replace major components prior to re-letting them.

In some instances, we may also bring forward the replacement of major components, and/or major/energy improvement works and/or decent homes works, to allow us to complete while the property is void, rather than disrupting the new customer and carrying out major works while the property is occupied.

Quality monitoring, feedback and reporting

We will aim to seek feedback from our residents when they move out of their home, about the reasons for leaving and about the services we have provided during their tenancy.

We routinely inspect/test a sample of completed minor works voids at random and we also aim to inspect 100% of major voids, prior to re-letting.

We will contact new residents within the first 14 days of them moving in, to check that all services have been properly reconnected and that they are familiar with the location and operation of key features (such as stop taps, heating controls and consumer units) and to give them an opportunity to discuss any issues.

We will regularly seek and review feedback and engage/consult our residents about the services we offer via various other methods and forums – which will also be used to help us to improve our standards, services and general offering.

We will undertake an annual program of customer satisfaction surveys, in line with the regulator's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) and review all relevant customer complaints to identify any potential trends in service failures.

All of the above will help us continue to identify opportunities to improve the services we provide and to ensure we are getting value for money from our property managers and contractors.

We hold regular meetings with our property managers/key contractors to discuss performance in general and against KPI's (key performance indicators), and operational performance summary reports are also produced and issued to senior management and our Board, on an at least quarterly basis.

Key legislation (but not limited to):

- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Social Housing Act 2023
- Landlord and Tenant Act
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Defective Premises Act 1972
- Building Regulations 1984
- Home (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Decent Homes Standard 2010
- Building Safety
- Gas Safety Regulations 1998
- Electricity and Work Regulations 1989
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

Policy review

We will review this policy every two years to address customer feedback, legislative, regulatory, best practice or operational issues, unless otherwise needed.

Appendix 1 – Minimum lettable standard

We are not responsible for the condition/level of internal decoration in a property. However, in some circumstances we may use discretion and award a decoration allowance if the property is in poor decorative order. This should be the exception and only when predicted, or actual increased, refusals are impacting upon rent loss.

Heating, ventilation, hot & cold-water supplies and drainage

We will:

- Make sure that the electrical installation is safe and any work needed is done to BS 7671 and to the manufacturer's instructions
- Carry out a full service and gas safety check to gas boilers and if relevant, any built-in gas appliances; and provide certification
- Remove any previous residents owned free standing gas, or electric cookers
- Remove any other appliances, unless the new resident wants them and these can be gifted to them
- Provide a fully tested carbon monoxide detector in any rooms where a gas, solid fuel or oil appliance is present
- Make sure there are two fully tested mains wired smoke detectors, one each to ground and first floor
- Clean and service existing extractor fans and, where there are not any, raise an order for this work to be done after the home is occupied
- Fit low energy light bulbs to all rooms
- Make sure all the taps work properly
- Make sure that hot and cold water supplies are safe and flow correctly
- Check that all visible supply pipework and wastes are leak and blockage free
- Provide a washing machine connection and waste
- Provide isolation valves to taps and fittings
- Provide properly lagged pipes and storage tanks
- Visually check gutters, downpipes, drains and gullies

Kitchens and bathrooms

We will:

- Make sure there are enough kitchen units and they are in good working condition
- Make sure cupboard doors and drawers work and the worktop is free from deep scratches
- Try to match drawer and cupboard drawer fronts if we need to replace some of them
- Make sure there is tiling to all splashbacks with clean grout and everything is properly sealed with mastic joints
- Make sure the bathroom, sink, bath, toilet and toilet seat are in good condition

- Try to match the colour of any bath, sink or toilet that needs replacing with the colour of the other fittings.
- Retain any showers already fitted, if they are in good condition. Where a shower is retained a screen or shower rail (with curtain) will be provided
- Inspect and consider replacing the kitchen or bathroom if, it is old and in poor condition
- Make sure that the bathroom floor has a slip resistant vinyl covering and that the kitchen floor vinyl is in good condition

Main structure of the building, walls, roofs, doors, floors and windows

We will:

- Visually inspect the external walls, roof structures and coverings, to ensure they are wind/weather proof and free from damp, mould and condensation
- Add loft insulation if we need to and make sure all the water pipes are lagged
- Make sure all the external and internal doors are in reasonable condition and that they are safe, secure and work properly. Bathroom doors to have locking device properly fitted
- Make sure any staircase, newel posts and handrails are safe and in good condition
- Make sure the floor structures are in reasonable condition with carpet grippers removed, and suitably level for residents' floor finishes
- Make sure all the windows are safe, secure and working properly and that they have restrictors fitted if they're above ground floor level. Window keys to be issued to customers where lockable windows fitted
- Make sure the internal walls and ceilings are in good condition, free from picture hooks , nails and screws etc, and are washed down ready for new residents to decorate their home

Cleaning

We will:

- Make sure all waste generated during our works is removed
- Take away any rubbish, or possessions left by the previous resident in either the property or the garden/outbuildings - and seek to recharge the former resident as appropriate
- Clean and sweep the property thoroughly internally and remove any marks on walls and surfaces
- Clean and sanitise kitchen and bathroom sanitaryware