



COUNCIL HOUSING VOIDS POLICY

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Links to Council Corporate Plan 2025-28

Council ambition	Linked?
Working for a prosperous future <i>We want to ensure the best possible local economy, with opportunities for our tenants to succeed and achieve</i>	Yes/ No
Healthier, safer communities <i>Tenants should feel safe in our Borough and supported to be more active in order to improve their health and wellbeing</i>	Yes/ No
A greener and cleaner environment <i>It's important to everyone that we look after our environment</i>	Yes /No
Restoring the Council to good health <i>We will place our Council on a sound financial footing and ensure resilience – delivering the service our tenants deserve and expect</i>	Yes/ No
We ♥ Castle Point <i>We will help create and maintain the best possible place to live in, work in and visit</i>	Yes/ No

Lead Officer responsible for owning the Policy and internal approval body (meeting / board where the Policy is approved for adoption or approved for referral to PFH or Committee for adoption)

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Lead Member and Committee responsible for approving Policy:

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Equality Impact Assessment undertaken? Yes

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 As a responsible social housing landlord, Castle Point Borough Council ("the Council") is committed to keeping the people safe that live in the homes it owns and manages. The purpose of this document is to describe how the Council manages its legal obligations in relation to void management. The Policy demonstrates how the Council complies with the *Regulator of Social Housing's 'Consumer Standards, 2024'* and health and safety legislation and approved codes of practice.
- 1.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the turnover of its homes is effectively managed to maximise safety and rental income, meeting housing needs that contribute to positive neighbourhoods. The Council has a customer focused, data led, performance driven voids management service, meeting the general housing needs of prospective tenants.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This Policy outlines the Council's approach and commitment to managing its empty homes quickly and efficiently.
- 2.2 A property is classed as a void property that is owned or managed by the Council when there is no current or 'live' tenancy running against the address. The void period is the time between one live tenancy ending and a new tenancy commencing.
- 2.3 This Policy covers the Council's re-lets of general needs, sheltered, and hostel accommodation.
- 2.4 This Policy does not apply to empty homes as defined by the Empty Homes Policy, 2025 or the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

3. Definitions

The Council	Castle Point Borough Council
General needs	All mainstream housing that can be of any size, that isn't designated for any specific group of people.
Hostel	Is housing, especially as an emergency solution for individuals and families facing homelessness. Often with private bedrooms and shared facilities.
Major void	Is an empty property that requires work that could not be reasonably carried out with a tenant living at the property. The target for major voids is to be completed in 15 days or less.
Minor void	Is an empty property that requires only minimal repairs and maintenance before it can be relet. The target for a minor void is 7 days.
Routine void	Is an empty home that requires some minimal repairs and maintenance before it can be relet. The target for a routine void is 10 days.
Sheltered housing	Is a type of housing designed for older adults who wish to live independently while receiving some support services.
Void	A property owned or managed by the Council for residential use which is not occupied and where there is no live tenancy.
Void period	Is the time between one live tenancy ending and a new tenancy commencing.

4. Aims and Objectives of the Policy

- 4.1 The aims of this Policy are to provide clarity on the Council's approach to managing and letting empty homes as quickly and efficiently as possible. This Policy outlines:
- a) how the Council ends tenancies
 - b) the tenant's responsibilities leading up to and including their tenancy ending
 - c) what to expect and why the Council carries out 'before tenancy end visits,' namely pre-void inspections
 - d) the Council's approach to void inspections
 - e) the work completed to prepare Council homes to be re-let
 - f) the Council's approach towards internal decoration
 - g) how the Council maximises and monitors customer satisfaction with its homes and gathers refusal data to analyse and inform process, budgets, and future actions

5. Policy Statement

- 5.1 With approximately 2,000 people on the Housing Register in 700 applications, and demand far greater than supply, it is vital that the Council lets its empty homes quickly and efficiently.
- 5.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the turnover of its homes is effectively managed to maximise safety and rental income, meeting housing needs that contribute to positive neighbourhoods. The Policy will ensure a forward looking and strategic approach to void management that will help to:
- a) minimise rent loss through reducing the length of the void period.
 - b) minimise the repair void costs by asking the outgoing tenant to complete work during the notice period.
 - c) set out the Council's Housing Service lettable standard ensuring that all Council employees, contractors and tenants are aware of exactly what condition the Council expects of its empty homes.
 - d) put in place systems for monitoring the standards of void properties and customer satisfaction with their new home.
- 5.3 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is funded from the income generated by the rental of the Council's homes. By focusing on the requirement to reduce the length of time a home is empty, this Policy seeks to reduce the impact of lost income to the HRA.

6. Legislation, Regulation and Guidance

- 6.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that tenants' homes are safe and fit for purpose, when they move in. In achieving this, the Council complies with relevant legislation and regulations.
- 6.2 The following list sets out the key legislation, regulations and guidance:
- Health and Safety at Work, Etc. Act 1974
 - Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
 - Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
 - Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992 (as amended)
 - Gas Safety (Management) Regulations 1996
 - Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 amended 2018
 - The Human Rights Act 1998

- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999
- Building Regulations 2000 (amended)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)
- Housing Act 2004
- Regulatory reform Fire Safety Order 2005 England and Wales
- Equality Act 2010
- British Standard (BS8580) Water Quality-Risk Assessments for Legionella Control-Code of Practice 2010
- The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Construction Design and Management Regulations (CDM 2015)
- Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016
- The Homes Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Regulator for Social Housing: Safety and Quality Standard, 2024
Tenancy Standard, 2024
- Approved code of practice and guidance on regulations L8 Legionnaires' disease: the control of Legionella bacteria in water systems
- HSG 274 part 2 "The control of legionella bacteria in hot and cold-water systems"
- HSG 274 part 3 "The control of legionella bacteria in other risk systems"
- "Guide to the design installation, testing and maintenance of services supplying water for domestic use within buildings and their curtilages" - Complementary guidance to BS EN 806
- Any subsequent legislation in force at the time

7. Ending Tenancies

- 7.1 All tenants are required to give 4 weeks' (28 calendar days) written notice terminating their tenancy (Notice to Quit) on a Sunday. Full details about ending a tenancy can be found in the tenancy agreement. On receipt of the Notice to Quit, the Council will confirm with the tenant the vacant possession date and remind them of their end of tenancy responsibilities.
- 7.2 Where the outgoing tenant has given notice and fails to leave the property after the end of the notice period, legal action may be taken to remove them from the property. In the event of the death of a tenant, where there is no successor, the Council will accept the Notice to Quit from the late tenant's next of kin, personal representative, or executor of the late tenant's estate. The requirement for 4 weeks' notice applies in these cases. In the instances where the tenancy has been ended due to the death of the sole tenant the executor of the estate is responsible for the removal of all goods from the property. If there is no executor, the Council will end the tenancy by service of a Notice to Quit on the Public Trustee. On expiry of this notice, any goods remaining in the property that are not required will be disposed of.
- 7.3 Tenancies always finish on a Sunday and keys must be returned to the Council at the Council's offices by 10am on the following Monday, or Tuesday if the Monday is a Bank Holiday. If a key-safe has been fitted by the Council or its contractors after the 'before moving out visit' (explained below) keys can be placed in there once the resident has

moved out. Where the keys are not returned at all, the cost of changing the locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant.

- 7.4 As part of the end of tenancy process, the tenant will allow the Council to carry out a 'before moving out visit'. This reminds tenants of their legal obligations and gives advice on what, if any, work they should do before they hand the keys back to the Council. This helps to speed up the time the property is empty, because ideally the outgoing tenant carries out the work before they surrender the keys, and this reduces any recharges for the outgoing tenant.
- 7.5 The Council actively encourages tenants to leave the property and external areas in a clean and tidy condition, as laid out in the tenancy agreement. When a Notice to Quit is received, all outgoing tenants will be reminded of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy. The Council will then arrange inspection of the property before the tenant moves out. This will enable the Housing Service to:
- a) identify any required repairs and to determine if the cost of repairing should be recharged to the tenant;
 - b) identify and notify maintenance contractors of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning; and
 - c) identify any factors which will be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, such as disabled adaptations.
- 7.6 The outgoing tenant will be responsible for the full costs of clearing out the property and any other rechargeable repairs identified.
- 7.7 The tenant will be made aware of any rechargeable repairs identified where possible during the pre-void inspection, namely the 'before moving out visit'. The outgoing tenant will be asked to sign the list of rechargeable repairs, and this will be used as a checklist to ensure that their responsibilities have been met. The Council reserves the right to recharge the outgoing tenant for any rechargeable works that occurred after, or that were not visible during, the 'before moving out visit'.
- 7.8 The tenant will also be informed about the status of their rent account and any sub accounts and will be required to make payments to clear any outstanding debt before the end of the tenancy.
- 7.9 If the tenant is in arrears but is unable to clear them in full before the end of the tenancy, they will be required to make an affordable payment agreement to clear the debt. Failure to do so will mean that the tenant will be pursued for any monies owing in accordance with the Council Housing's Income Recovery Policy. The outgoing tenant will be required to provide a forwarding address.
- 7.10 Where it is suspected that a property is abandoned, the statutory procedures will be followed, as detailed in the Council Housing Tenancy Management Policy.

8. Responsibilities of the vacating tenants

- 8.1 The vacating tenants are required to fulfil the following conditions when they wish to end their tenancy:
- 'General conditions':**
- a) provide a minimum of 4 weeks' notice of their intention to move out;
 - b) allow Council employees access to pre-inspect the property with an appointment;
 - c) allow Council employees to show prospective tenants to view the property before it becomes empty;

- d) have a clear rent account;
- e) return all the keys to the property, as stated above;
- f) have all utility meters read before moving out. If key meters are fitted, leave the keys in the meters with no debts. If a debt is discovered, the Council will forward the contact details to the utility companies;
- g) provide a forwarding address;
- h) allow access to carry out minor repairs, if reported or identified in the pre-void inspection before they vacate the property; and
- i) put in place a postal redirection service.

‘Cleaning and clearing’:

- a) make sure that the garden is tidy and free of rubbish;
- b) remove all furniture, belongings and any rubbish from the property including the loft, the garden, and sheds; and
- c) leave the property in a clean condition – windows, floors, cupboards, worktops and all sanitaryware.

‘Decorations, fixtures, and fittings’:

- a) make sure the property is in good decorative order;
- b) repair any damage caused by moving fittings and fixtures;
- c) repair everything that has been damaged; and
- d) agree with staff and clearly mark any items such as flooring they wish to leave behind for the next incoming tenant.

9. Pre-void inspection – ‘before moving out visit’

- 9.1 The pre-void inspection is a fundamental stage in helping the Council let its homes quickly and efficiently. At the pre-void inspection, the condition of the property and the assets will be noted, details about the kitchen, bathroom, boiler, any asbestos present and anything else that it might want to start planning to remove or replace so that the void period is kept to an absolute minimum.
- 9.2 Any adaptations to the property, such as a flush-floor shower, wheelchair-height kitchen cupboards and handrails, etc. will be noted at this time. This information will be shared with the Housing Allocations team, so that they are able to offer the property to an appropriate prospective tenant.
- 9.3 At the pre-void inspection the tenant will be advised what work they need to do before they hand the keys back to restore the property to a ‘reasonable condition,’ as per the tenancy agreement. This has the benefit of getting the work identified at the pre-void inspection carried out by the outgoing tenant and reduces the time it takes for the Council to re-let the property and reduces the likelihood of re-charges to the outgoing tenant.

10. Void inspection

- 10.1 A full survey will be carried out as soon as the property is vacant which will cover areas that cannot be accessed during occupation. The inspecting officer will identify any repairs that may have been missed or hidden by furniture during the pre-void inspection that need to be recharged. The inspecting officer will compile a list of works that need to be carried out to the empty home to bring it up to the lettable standard.
- 10.2 At this inspection the Council will confirm if the former tenant has complied with all of their end of tenancy obligations.

- 10.3 The outgoing tenant is responsible for removing all personal possessions from the property. If the Council has to remove rubbish and belongings the tenant will be charged for the costs. Section 41 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 requires local authorities to keep property left in their premises only for one month after having given notice to the tenant. At the pre-void inspection notice of the Council's intention to dispose of any items left in the property will be given; it then gives the Council the power to dispose of property left in a Council home.
- 10.4 The Council will recharge any outgoing tenant for the costs of making good or renewing any damage caused to the property (outside normal wear and tear), undertaking repairs to poorly fitted tenant improvement works and for clearing any rubbish and/or belongings that have been left at the property. Recharges may also be applied for the cost of cleaning and/or de-infesting the property. Date stamped photographs will be taken of anything that results in a re-charge to the former tenant.
- 10.5 It is imperative that where a re-charge to the tenant is identified, this is properly documented on the void inspection report and supported with photographic evidence obtained before the void works are carried out to formally record and prove the need for a recharge. This needs to be evidence that can be relied upon in court.
- 10.6 An assessment for asbestos removal will take place once the scope of works has been determined and in conjunction with the voids removal guidelines, contained within the Council Housing Asbestos Safety Procedures.

11. Preparing the empty home for re-letting

- 11.1 The Council aims to identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible. All works undertaken in the property will be completed to the lettable standard.
- 11.2 The Council will carry out a post-inspection of the empty homes before they are let to make sure the contractor has carried out the work to a satisfactory standard and the property meets the lettable standard.
- 11.3 All void properties must have had a gas and electrical check and have the necessary certificates in place before they are ready to let. Copies of these are given to the new tenant as part of the sign-up process and stored electronically.
- 11.4 The Council will flush all water supplies in empty properties during the void period so that the risk of legionella is mitigated.
- 11.5 In exceptional circumstances, minor or non-essential repairs will be undertaken once the tenancy has commenced. These repairs and the timescales for their completion will be agreed with the new tenant.
- 11.6 All properties will have a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC); a copy of this will be issued to the incoming tenant, as per the legal requirements.
- 11.7 The Council will undertake an asbestos survey in the void property and advise all incoming tenants if there is any asbestos present when they sign up for their new home.
- 11.8 The Council will ensure that properties are checked against the planned works programme to make the most cost-effective use of resources. If a property falls into a geographical area where planned maintenance work is being undertaken, the property will be moved to the top of the planned maintenance list for these works to be completed as soon as possible.
- 11.9 Major repairs and any necessary works to meet the required safety standards that would cause a high level of disruption to tenants or put their safety at risk, such as the removal of

asbestos and any damp or rot treatments, will be completed prior to the start of the new tenancy.

12. Internal decoration

- 12.1 The Council will undertake basic redecoration, where required, before the property is let. The Council will ensure that all sheltered housing is in good internal decorative order throughout, including woodwork, walls and ceilings.
- 12.2 General needs properties will be left in a suitable condition so that the property can be decorated by the incoming tenant. A decoration voucher may be provided where the property needs decoration, this either gives the incoming tenant a voucher to exchange for paint or a full decorating box containing brushes, tape, and other materials, to help towards the costs of redecoration.
- 12.3 Where the vacating tenant has left significant smoke staining, or dark colours, consideration will be given to the need to apply a mist coat of emulsion prior to re-letting.

13. Managing risk

- 13.1 The Council needs to manage the risk of loss of income to the Housing Revenue Account.
- 13.2 The Council needs to manage the reputational risk of leaving homes vacant for longer than necessary or re-letting them in poor condition.
- 13.3 The Council needs to make the best use of its housing stock.
- 13.4 The Council needs to reduce the amount of time a home is empty as this could attract attention from theft, potential squatters, or vandals.
- 13.5 The Council needs to manage the risk of people running up large arrears and then leaving without providing their forwarding address.
- 13.6 The Council needs to manage the risk of tenants leaving their home in a poor condition and then incurring large void losses and void costs for bringing the home back to its lettable standard.

14. Tenant Engagement

- 14.1 Tenants will be involved in the review of the Council's lettable standard each time it is reviewed.
- 14.2 Satisfaction with the service provided will be monitored through 'new tenancy' visits and repairs satisfaction forms. Feedback received from these surveys may be used to inform amendments to the Policy and thus improve the service provided to new tenants.

15. Contractor Engagement

- 15.1 The Council will share information from the pre-void inspection with the voids contractor so they can plan and schedule work efficiently to reduce the time its homes are empty.
- 15.2 The Council will require its contractor to work in an efficient manner, having regard to the neighbourhood and those residents living nearby. No rubbish will be left outside of the vacant home, and any skips will be covered overnight, which may attract other fly-tipping and draw attention to the empty home.
- 15.3 The Council requires its contractors to follow all health and safety practices and not to tamper with any gas supplies that may have been capped for safety purposes.

- 15.4 The Council will meet with its voids contractor regularly to discuss performance and ensure that work is completed within an acceptable timescale. The Council will effectively manage the contract.

16. Monitoring and Continual Improvement

- 16.1 The voids performance will be monitored weekly at an operational level.
- 16.2 The Council will report monthly key performance indicator (KPI) measures for void performance internally to its Housing Management Team and escalated, if necessary, to the Senior Leadership Team.
- 16.3 How will the Council measure success – it will develop a suite of key performance information KPIs using its housing system that measures:
- a) average re-let times for all voids, including breakdown into sheltered and general needs housing;
 - b) percentage of void loss for general needs homes;
 - c) percentage of void loss for sheltered housing homes;
 - d) percentage of empty homes where 'before you move out visit' is carried out;
 - e) average cost of bringing a void property to the lettable standard;
 - f) actual numbers of voids (terminated and re-let);
 - g) offer refusal rates and reasons; and
 - h) number of void properties.
- This information will be shared with the Council's engaged tenants, who will also monitor performance.
- 16.4 The Interim Head of Housing Technical Services will also report quarterly to the Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing, and all reporting information will be shared on the Council's website.
- 16.5 Internal and external audits and reviews provide data reflecting the effectiveness of this Policy and identify opportunities to achieve continual improvement in the management of void properties at the Council. The Council will commission an independent audit of void management at least once every five years, to identify any non-compliance issues. An action plan will be developed for any issues identified during the audit, with timescales agreed for corrective actions to be carried out. Other checks and reviews may be undertaken periodically, as required.

17. Data and Records

- 17.1 The Council will maintain a core asset register of all properties it owns or manages and update this after each pre-void and void inspection.
- 17.2 The Council will keep all records and data in line with its Document Retention Policy and will have robust processes and controls in place to maintain appropriate levels of security for all void related data.

18. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 18.1 This Policy has been written to consider all protected characteristics, as set out in the Equality Act 2010. An Equality Impact Assessment 'initial screening' has been carried out (see Appendix 1) which identified the need to work with occupational therapy for people who need a home that is a purpose-built disabled persons unit or adapted to meet their needs.

- 18.2 The Council provides housing for communities which include wide social diversity and is committed to providing a fair and equal service to its residents. Through the management of its empty properties, the Council aims to treat all tenants fairly, with dignity, and with respect and professionalism. In accordance with the duty placed on the Council under the Equality Act 2010, specific consideration of the impact of this Policy has been given to people with protected characteristics, including gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status or other protected characteristics. The Council will ensure that its services are accessible, responsive, and sensitive to the diverse needs of all individuals.
- 18.3 In addition, to support the needs of tenants whose first language is not English, the Council will provide translation and interpretation services, when needed. The Council will provide information that is accessible and available in other formats such as large print, audio and braille, as needed.

19. Communication

- 19.1 Once the Policy is approved, a summary document - "a policy on a page" - will be placed on the Council's website with a link to the full Policy. An approved version of this Policy will be published internally and accessible to staff.

20. Review of Policy

- 20.1 This Policy will be reviewed initially after a period of 12 months and then every three years, unless new legislation or good practice, or in the event of a relevant major incident that means it needs to be reviewed sooner.

21. Consultation

- 21.1 The Council is committed to meaningful tenant engagement and involvement. The Council intends to consult with tenants on this Policy, once its structure for tenant and leaseholder engagement is in place following the work the Council is doing with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (Tpas).

22. Training

- 22.1 The Council will maintain a skills/training matrix to ensure that all Council employees undertaking key roles within the scope of this Policy have appropriate training.
- 22.2 Training will be carried out to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities for the effective management of the Council's empty homes.
- 22.3 Training records will be kept for all courses attended.

23. Significant Non-compliance and Escalation

- 23.1 The Council's definition of significant non-compliance is any incident which has the potential to result in a breach of legislation or regulatory standard, or which causes a risk to health or safety. All non-compliance issues will be reported and escalated as soon as possible, and no later than 24 hours after the incident occurred or of the Council employee being made aware.
- 23.2 Any non-compliance issue identified at an operational level will be formally reported to the Housing Compliance Manager in the first instance, who will agree an appropriate course of corrective action with the relevant Assistant Director, and Interim Head of Housing Technical Services. The Assistant Director will report details of the same to a member of

the Senior Leadership Team, which includes the Chief Executive, Director, Corporate and Customer, Director, Commercial and Assets and Director, Place and Communities and Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, and Assistant Director, Finance & Procurement and Section 151 Officer.

- 23.3 In cases of serious non-compliance the Chief Executive will notify the Leader, Deputy Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing.
- 23.4 In cases of serious non-compliance, the Chief Executive will consider whether it is necessary to disclose the issue to the Regulator of Social Housing, as required by the regulatory framework, and/or any other relevant organisation such as the Health and Safety Executive.

24. Governance

- 24.1 The Council has overall responsibility for ensuring that this Policy is implemented to ensure compliance with the law and requirements placed upon the Council by the Regulator of Social Housing. In particular, the Safety and Quality Standard 2024 sets out the requirements to provide tenants with quality accommodation and a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service. The Tenancy Standard 2024 sets out the requirements to let homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way and to record all lettings, as required by the Continuous Recordings of Lettings (CORE) system.
- 24.2 The Chief Executive reports to Cabinet to demonstrate accountability for corporate health and safety across the Council and is accountable for ensuring that health and safety compliance and void management duties in its landlord function are properly controlled and managed to keep its tenants safe, and compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards 2024. Paragraph 26 of the Constitution sets out the Officer Scheme of Delegation with regard to the responsibilities of the Leadership Team and allows the Chief Executive to sub-delegate to the Directors and Assistant Director to facilitate the efficient and smooth running of services.
- 24.3 The day-to-day responsibility for ensuring that void management for the Council's homes is implemented in line with this Policy has been delegated, via the Chief Executive, to the Director, Place and Communities. In addition, the Interim Director of Housing is responsible for providing health and safety leadership across the Housing Service. The Void Management Procedure also identifies the roles and responsibilities of those who will undertake the day-to-day tasks on behalf of the Director, Place and Communities.
- 24.4 The Director, Place and Communities has delegated their duty holder responsibility to the Interim Assistant Director of Housing Assets, who has professional and technical responsibility for the homes and communal areas the Council owns.

25. Associated Policies and Procedures

Council Housing Lettable Standard
Council Housing Maintenance and Repairs Policy
Repairs Handbook
Council Housing Disrepair Policy
Council Housing Mutual Exchange Policy
Council Housing Temporary Relocation (Decant) Policy
Council Housing Asset Management Strategy

26. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment for Council Housing Voids Policy

