Empty Homes Policy

Approved by: Customer Experience Committee

Approved on: 10 September 2026

Next review Date: September 2029

Applies to: RHP Association

INTRODUCTION

RHP is committed to effectively managing empty homes within our stock, to ensure that we minimise rent loss, meet local housing needs, and provide safe homes for our customers. We recognise that homes that are lived in contribute to safer, stronger, and more sustainable communities, and therefore it is important to maximise the number of homes available to let and to reduce the time that homes are empty.

This policy sets out RHP's approach to managing the empty homes that we own and manage. This policy applies to RHP's social rented and key worker homes, including sheltered and extra-care schemes, and traveller pitch kitchen and bathroom buildings. This policy does not apply to communal areas, or homes let via mutual exchange.

This policy complies with all relevant statutory and regulatory health and safety requirements.

This policy is relevant to RHP only.

Definitions

An "empty home" is defined as a property which does not have a legitimate, active tenancy.

A "vacant period" is the time between a previous live tenancy ending, and a new live tenancy commencing.

A "hard to let" home is a property which remains vacant for an extended period due to low demand.

This policy is supported by the following documents:

- Repairs Policy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Complaints Policy
- Compensation Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Disposals Policy
- The Health and Safety Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- What to expect in your new home (Lettable Standard)

RHP'S APPROACH

As part of a good empty homes policy, we recognise that a clear set of procedures must be followed to ensure that a property is properly managed when it becomes vacant. This includes conducting repair works to bring the property up to RHP's Lettable Standard, whilst ensuring that rent loss is minimised throughout the vacant period.

Classification of empty homes

Empty homes are classified based on the extent of works required as follows, which is based on CORE (Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England) guidance:

- Major repairs empty home - are homes requiring works which could not reasonably be carried out with a tenant in occupation, and which need to be carried out in a property while it is vacant. Major repair works include structural repairs, site works, services installations, consequential works, works that significantly improve the dwelling, and notifiable asbestos removal.
- Minor repairs empty home – an empty home will be classified as minor, if it does not fall into the major category as mentioned above.

- Policy empty homes – RHP may intentionally keep a home empty for specific strategic or operational reasons, and classify an empty home as "policy" in certain circumstances, including:
    - If the home is due to be demolished.
    - If the home is due to be sold, for example:
        - If the property is being purchased through a local authority buyback scheme.
        - If the property has been approved for disposal. Empty homes will be assessed in line with RHP's Disposal Policy.
    - Where a management decision has been made to temporarily or permanently not re-let a home, including:
        - Situations where re-letting would be considered inappropriate.
        - Major works pending a re-let decision.
        - Regeneration projects.
        - The home being used for an alternative business purpose, such as a site or customer office.

The Voids and Lettings Lead or Voids and Lettings Manager will determine which empty homes are to be classed as "policy empty homes", and these homes will not be included in reported re-let times. In some circumstances, policy empty homes may be removed from the rent debit subject to approval from the Executive Director of Operations, and the relevant approval hierarchy being sought through the "Long term empty homes" form. Policy empty homes will be reviewed every six months by the Voids and Lettings Lead to ensure their classification remains valid. Where appropriate, RHP may permit the use of property guardians in policy homes under specific circumstances to help maintain a sense of community. An example would be homes within a regeneration programme that are awaiting demolition and cannot reasonably be re-let. Where empty homes are impacted by anti-social behaviour concerns, RHP will work in accordance with its Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and relevant partner agencies.

Aids and adaptions

Properties which are already adapted will be assessed when they become empty. Any changes to adaptions will be assessed by the Voids and Lettings Lead or Voids and Lettings Manager based on their fitness for purpose, and in line with RHP's Asset Management Strategy. Wherever possible, RHP will liaise with the nominating authority to ensure that incoming nominees are matched to properties with adaptations that best meet their needs, maximising the benefit of existing adaptations.

Additional adaptations to empty homes are not covered by this policy and will not be carried out during vacant periods. If an incoming customer requires specific adaptions, this will be assessed by the relevant local authority's Aids and Adaptions service after a tenancy commences, based on Occupational Therapist recommendations, confirmation of Disabled Facilities Grant funding approval, and in line with RHP's Aids and Adaptions process.

Allocations and lettings

Empty homes will be allocated and let in line with RHP's Allocations Policy, which supports compliance with the Tenancy Standard. Customer viewings will not be carried out whilst works to empty homes are in progress, unless deemed safe to do so with prior permission granted from RHP Home. Prospective customers will be invited to view a home before they choose to accept the property.

EMPTY HOMES WORKS AND CHECKS

Contractors

RHP will outsource empty homes works to our in-house repairs service, RHP Home, who will appoint contractors and / or Repair Technicians to conduct the work. We will ensure that all operatives, contractors, and sub-contractors working on our behalf are suitably skilled and qualified for the work.

The works will be subject to inspection by RHP Home upon completion to ensure compliance with the required Lettable Standard.

Lettable Standard

RHP has a defined Lettable Standard, named “What to expect in your new home”. RHP’s Lettable Standard defines the condition that empty homes will be brought up to during vacant periods, and ensures that a home is safe, clean and in a reasonable state of repair. Our Lettable Standard is assessed to ensure that it complies with the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Where certain items covered by the standards are due to be replaced within a reasonable time as part of current planned maintenance programme, the new customer will be given the appropriate information.

Homes that are considered to be “hard to let” may receive additional works above the Lettable Standard, including internal decoration and carpeting to additional rooms.

RHP will assess the Lettable Standard regularly to ensure it remains compliant with DHS and HHSRS, whilst providing value for money for the organisation.

Asbestos

We maintain a register of known asbestos containing materials (ACMs) present in our properties and buildings and check this register before commencing work in areas where ACMs may be present. We will take all appropriate measures when working with ACMs to ensure safety of customers, Repair Technicians, and contractors.

If no asbestos survey exists for the empty home, or if the existing survey is outdated or incomplete, a new survey will be carried out. If the survey identifies ACMs that require remediation, then remediation will be carried out in line with the recommended survey actions and in line with RHP’s asbestos processes. ACMs will not be removed in empty homes unless specifically recommended in the report.

Gas safety

All repair and maintenance work involving a gas supply will be undertaken by a qualified and registered gas engineer and in line with RHP’s processes.

During vacant periods, any property with a live gas supply will be capped. Once a new tenancy has commenced, the gas will be uncapped by our gas engineers at a convenient time arranged with the customer, within the agreed service level agreement set with RHP’s appointed gas engineers.

For all homes with a live gas supply, a copy of the Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) will be provided to customers via email in their tenancy welcome pack.

Electrical safety

All repair and maintenance work involving an electric supply will be undertaken by a qualified and registered electrician and in line with RHP’s processes. A copy of the Electrical Safety Installation Report (EICR) will be provided to customers via email in their tenancy welcome pack.

Water safety

During vacant periods, water systems will be routinely flushed to reduce the risk of water-based bacteria build-up. Flushing frequency will be carried out in line with RHP’s processes. Long-term empty homes, and homes that are empty during periods of cold weather will be drained down to reduce the risk of burst pipes.

Fire safety

Any works carried out during vacant periods relating to fire safety will be in line with RHP’s Fire Safety Policy. Empty homes will be brought up to the minimum legal standard as documented in RHP’s Fire

Safety Policy. Works conducted on in-scope buildings will adhere to RHP's Fire Safety Policy and the building's relevant Resident Engagement Strategy.

Energy performance

Empty homes will meet the minimum statutory energy performance requirements. A copy of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) will be provided to customers via email in their tenancy welcome pack. If an empty home does not meet the minimum energy performance requirements for re-letting and would require significant investment for this to be achieved, then the property will be assessed in line with RHP's Disposals Policy.

Outstanding repairs

In most cases, all empty homes works will be completed in the vacant period before a home is re-let. In some instances, a property may be let with some minor repairs outstanding where they are not deemed to pose a safety risk. If this is the case, we will inform customers of the extent of the outstanding works, and a timescale for the repairs to be completed in.

Repairs following the commencement of a new tenancy

Following the commencement of a tenancy, if any remedial or repair works are identified by the customer then these should be reported to our Repairs Team. All repairs will be handled in line with our Repairs Policy.

Documentation

Upon completion of an empty home, the property will only be deemed as "ready to let" when the appropriate documentation and certification required for letting is provided to the Voids and Lettings Team by RHP's appointed contractor. The documentation will be held by RHP to support stock condition information and asset management data.

If applicable, documentation should also be provided where works have been carried out that require building regulations, fire compliance, or fire detection certification.

GENERAL

Health and safety

We will implement this policy in compliance with all relevant statutory and regulatory health and safety requirements.

Equality and diversity

We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people in line with our Equality and Diversity Policy. We will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities and will take positive action where appropriate.

We will make appropriate arrangements where necessary to ensure that customers with distinct communication needs are not unreasonably and disproportionately affected. This could involve providing communications in alternative languages or formats or providing interpretative or transcriptive assistance where appropriate.

Training

We will provide all employees responsible for implementing this policy with comprehensive training as required.

Complaints

Customers who are dissatisfied with decisions taken under this policy may use RHP's Complaints procedure.

Monitoring and reporting

We will monitor our empty homes performance, including year to date re-let time and empty homes rent loss. Performance will be reported on a regular basis to the Executive Committee and the Customer Experience Committee. Performance data will also be included in the annual report to customers. Separate operational targets will be set for our in-house repairs service, RHP Home. A sample of empty homes will be post-inspected to ensure that our Lettable Standard is being achieved.

Customer feedback will be captured via a Voids and Lettings customer satisfaction survey after the new tenancy commences. Feedback will be regularly reviewed by the Voids and Lettings Lead and Voids and Lettings Manager, and results will be reported on a regular basis to the Executive Committee and the Customer Experience Committee.

DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

Document Title: Empty Homes Policy

Reason for Revision	Revision	Revised By	Revision Date	Approved By
New policy	2026	Richard Williams – Voids & Lettings Lead	25/06/2026	Customer Experience Committee