



Policy Outline

Empty Homes and Allocations Policy

OVERALL PURPOSE

West North West homes Leeds Empty Homes and Allocations Policy outlines our approach to managing empty/void properties and our responsibilities as an ALMO of how we will let properties and undertake Leeds City Councils statutory duties to ensure that reasonable preference is given to customers in housing need according to the Leeds City Councils Lettings Policy as part of a Management Agreement.

It provides a link to both our own Empty Homes Strategy and the Leeds City Council Lettings Policy and sets out our commitment to high quality service delivery and estate management, with an aim of achieving sustainable communities, excellent customer service and value for money.

INTRODUCTION

West North West homes Leeds is responsible for:

- Ensuring empty properties receive a health & safety check and are left in a clean, tidy and a secure condition
- Ensuring the empty properties are surveyed within 2 working days following receipt of keys
- Ensuring Asbestos tests are carried out where necessary in compliance with the set regulations
- Ensuring that all repairs identified are carried out within agreed timescales and meet our agreed Empty Homes and Allocations standard
- Minimising the number of empty properties amongst our stock
- Assessing housing needs
- Allocations of properties according to the Leeds City Council's lettings policy and our own Empty Homes Strategy
- Ensure all properties receive an Energy Performance Certificate
- Consultation with tenants

- To provide an excellent empty homes and allocations service for existing and potential customers, including diverse and vulnerable customers ensuring all Customers have equal access to reflect the diverse population of Leeds.

West North West homes Leeds will apply the following Leeds City Councils procedures, which will be monitored and audited regularly:

- Applying for housing
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups
- Eligibility
- Suitability
- Assessing housing Needs
- Priority Extensions/Deferrals
- Direct Lets
- Offers / Refusal of accommodation
- Appeals

West North West homes Leeds will look at developing options for existing customers to transfer properties.

West North West homes Leeds will work with the National Mutual Exchange scheme in promoting and accepting applicants.

West North West homes Leeds aims and objectives for allocations within the ALMO, ensuring the Leeds City Council Lettings Policy is complied with, offering incentives to existing tenants within the ALMO, ensuring choice to all customers with the provision of feedback and performance information regularly, supporting all other related legislation, policy and procedures.

West North West homes Leeds will promptly identify and re-let empty properties in accordance with the Leeds City Councils Lettings Policy and Procedures, taking into account agreed service standards and our lettable standard to maximise the number of homes available to our customers

West North West homes Leeds will monitor contractor arrangements to ensure a high quality of service is provided within agreed timescales and provide choices to our customers where this is possible and appropriate.

West North West homes Leeds will carry out option appraisals on high cost empty properties or low demand/difficult to let properties, to ensure best use of stock and value for money.

West North West homes Leeds will ensure that high quality Customer Care is delivered at all times ensuring we are committed to all our customers with the provision of feedback and performance information regularly, supporting all other related legislation, policy and procedures.

Service Standards

1. We will repair empty properties and make them ready to be re-let within 32 days.
2. We will ensure your new home meets our Empty Homes Standard before you accept your new tenancy.
3. We will invite our Tenant Inspectors to reality check a sample of our empty properties on a monthly basis.
4. We will register any new Leeds Housing Register application forms within 10 working days.
5. We will provide you with an accompanied viewing of your prospective new home.
6. We will measure your satisfaction with the service you are receiving from the Empty Homes and Allocations team.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

We will monitor the implementation and delivery of services through this Policy through:

- Average re-let time
- Number of Empty Properties
- Number of Applications registered within 10 working days
- Number of Accompanied Viewings
- Customer Satisfaction of Service Delivery
- Number of Health and Safety checks carried out
- Number of Empty Homes Surveys carried out
- Number of Quality Checks completed
- Number of Reality Checks carried out with Tenant Inspectors
- Number of Complaints Received
- % Complaints responded to within timescales
- Tenancy turnover
- Expenditure on Empty Homes

We have a Performance Management Framework with SMART Targets for the above which is reported monthly to SMT and Board.

Empty Homes and Allocations Policy

1. Statement of Intent

- 1.1 West North West homes Leeds aims to deliver an effective and efficient Empty Homes and Allocations service which provides customers with homes in which they want to live.
- 1.2 West North West homes Leeds aims to achieve a balance between meeting need, giving choice and equality to customers, creating and maintaining sustainable communities and Decent Homes, and achieving Value for Money when managing and repairing empty properties within the council stock.
- 1.3 West North West homes Leeds will ensure that we fulfil our legal requirements in relation to empty properties and repairs, ensuring customers are given clear information relating to our empty homes and allocations procedures and standards relating the delivery of these.
- 1.4 West North West homes Leeds will make applying for accommodation as easy as possible ensuring we are easy to contact through locally based, accessible and convenient offices throughout the area and through our Leeds City Council Customer Services. We will provide interpretation, translation and BSL sign language services upon request by arrangement with various providers.

2.0 Outline of Service

- 2.1 West North West homes Leeds will ensure empty properties are visited on receipt of keys to ensure the property is secure.
- 2.2 West North West homes Leeds will ensure that all empty homes receive a health and safety check to ensure safety for residents in the community and contractors.
- 2.3 West North West homes Leeds will carry out Asbestos tests in accordance with the control of asbestos regulations ensuring all measures are complied with before allowing any works or customers access to the property.
- 2.4 West North West homes Leeds will ensure that the property is fully surveyed by the designated contractor to repair the property to the agreed Empty Homes and Allocations standard ensuring the properties are clean, tidy and secure at all times.
- 2.5 West North West homes Leeds will ensure that all properties receive an Energy Performance Certificate.
- 2.6 West North West homes Leeds will identify any damage from previous residents and recharge them where tenancy conditions have not been met .
- 2.7 West North West homes Leeds will ensure that all empty properties receive a quality check prior to them returning to the Empty Homes and Allocations Team which will be carried out by a Contractors Supervisor.

- 2.8 West North West homes Leeds will ensure that random reality checks are carried out by appointed tenant inspectors.
- 2.9 West North West homes Leeds will assess any need for adaptation where appropriate ensuring the needs of the customer are considered when works are being carried out.
- 2.10 West North West homes Leeds will assess high cost empty properties or low demand/difficult to let properties to ensure best use of stock and value for money ensuring the future customer needs are considered in delivering properties fit for purpose.
- 2.11 West North West homes Leeds will work in partnership with Repairs contractors to deliver effective services, offering the customer's joint accompanied viewing with the Empty Homes and Allocations Team to offer choice where possible.
- 2.12 West North West homes Leeds will work in partnership with contractors to achieve best practice and an excellent void repair service, which demonstrates value for money.
- 2.13 West North West homes Leeds aims to provide housing accommodation that is well managed and maintained and which meets the needs, requirements and where possible, the aspirations of the current or potential residents within the ALMO for the future. West North West homes Leeds will ensure that the Empty Homes and Allocations Standard is applied to all empty properties.
- 2.14 West North West homes Leeds aims to achieve upper quartile on all Key Performance Indicators in partnership within the ALMO and with partnering contractors we will Benchmark against other ALMO's and organisations nationally to ensure we maintain good performance.
- 2.15 West North West homes Leeds aims to ensure customers are given the opportunity to express their preferences in properties by advertising properties available through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) maximising choice wherever possible. We aim to advertise available adapted properties offering choice to customers assessed with disability needs by advertising adapted properties in the Leeds Homes magazine.
- 2.16 West North West homes Leeds will apply the Direct Lets legal obligation to customers who will qualify either as a result of a legal obligation outside of Part 6 1996 Housing Act, a contractual obligation or corporate priority or to make best use of housing stock.
- 2.17 West North West homes Leeds aims to ensure effective use of Leeds City Council stock by promoting under occupation incentives to existing tenants within the ALMO, reducing the overcrowding within current homes.
- 2.18 To facilitate regeneration, we aim to offer incentives and offer choice to customers in clearance areas to support good housing management by utilising and making best use of ALMO properties and maintaining local communities but still allowing customer choice.

- 2.19 West North West homes Leeds currently have a number of Local Lettings Policies which were reviewed in April 2009 and agreed with all our customers and approved by Leeds City Council. All Local Lettings Policies will be reviewed on an annual basis with a view to reducing and removing such policies to ensure equitable access to reflect diverse communities.
- 2.20 West North West homes Leeds aims to encourage customers to consider a variety of alternative housing options by providing information on request to customers on the housing register. This will include:
- Mutual Exchanges;
 - Other Registered Social Landlords;
 - Other Private Landlords registered through the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme
- 2.21 West North West homes Leeds will encourage customers to widen their areas of choices beyond the high demand property types and areas by applying the time period for priority for customers in housing need. An effective tenancy management will address local housing issues ensuring known perpetrators of Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour, Domestic Violence, Hate Crime may be found unsuitable to be a West North West homes Leeds customer We will look at implementing risk assessments for Hate Crime and Domestic Violence.
- 2.22 West North West homes Leeds will provide every customer with an accompanied viewing of the property offered and a sign up appointment to provide you with information and guidance on your rights and responsibilities of the tenancy agreement and management of your tenancy.
- 2.23 West North West homes Leeds aims to achieve an equitable, transparent, efficient and customer focused service to ensure consistency on all processes by developing clear procedures in accordance with the Leeds City Council's Lettings Policy and our own Empty Homes Strategy ensuring errors are kept to a minimum and are responded to promptly and performance information is published regularly by several methods.
- 2.24 West North West homes Leeds Tenancy Support Team will risk assess customers to identify through their applications if they require support and develop a support plan tailored to the customers needs with support providers and other agencies to assist in identifying the appropriate accommodation and sustain tenancies long term.
- 2.25 West North West homes Leeds will identify sheltered accommodation for customers with assessed sheltered requirements for sheltered facilities with the provision of a warden and alarm call service, ensuring support is in place which will be regularly reviewed and monitored individually working closely with support providers and other agencies.
- 2.26 West North West homes Leeds aims to develop good multi agency working with partner agencies for example Stonham, Community Links, Supporting People

working in conjunction with a number of other corporate and departmental strategies and policies listed in Section 8.1

3.0 Specific Needs

- 3.1 West North West Homes Leeds will take into account the specific needs, which may arise, of older and vulnerable people, disabled people and Black and Minority Ethnic groups, gender, transgender, sexual orientation, age and religion/faith/ belief in a manner that promotes equality and inclusiveness ensuring all customers are treated equally and fairly.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 West North West homes Leeds will seek the views of tenants on this policy in a variety of different ways through our Customer Involvement mechanisms.

5.0 Implementation

- 5.1 The Board, Chief Executive and members of Empty Homes and Allocations management team at WNWhL, are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- 5.2 It is the responsibility of all West North West homes Leeds' employees to ensure that their work is carried out in line with this policy and procedures relating to it.
- 5.3 We will introduce all the necessary information and procedures into all our training packages with staff. Empty Homes and Allocations training will be a mandatory course for all new starters.

6.0 Monitoring

- 6.1 West North West homes Leeds will monitor our empty property performance and processes and obtain customer and tenant satisfaction levels to ensure all client groups are being considered to assist West North West homes Leeds in the development of healthy neighbourhoods and communities.
- 6.2 West North West homes Leeds will measure our performance of Empty Homes and Allocations through our local performance indicators and service standards.

7.0 Review

In preparation for delivering this policy during 2009 West North West homes Leeds has reviewed and taken into account new or emerging government legislation and government and council policies.

As a result, this policy now fully reflects, and is inclusive of the issues arising from those policies and legislation, and considers the impacts arising.

- 7.1 We will review and monitor the accessibility and service delivery within our neighbourhood offices and consult with customer on new ways of working to improve our service to support all customers' needs.
- 7.2 We will involve customers in the monitoring and inspection of the service.
- 7.3 The commissioning Body has overall statutory responsibility for the development and agreement of a supporting people strategy and annual plan.
- 7.4 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by West North West homes.

8.0 Legislation

8.1 New or emerging legislation and new policy for 2009 include:

- Empty Homes Strategy
- Domestic Violence Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Sheltered Support Policy
- Tenant Support Policy
- Vulnerability Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Complaints/Compliments Policy
- Leeds City Council Lettings Policy
- Recharge Policy

- Vulnerability Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Valuing People Strategy
- Cohesion and Diversity Strategy
- Supporting People Strategy
- Leeds Housing Strategy for Older People
- Leeds Neighbourhoods and Housing Empty Homes Strategy 2006 -2010

- Housing Act 2004
- Data Protection Act 1998

This Policy was approved and implemented June 2008. This Policy has been reviewed and approved in July 2009. The next review date will be July 2010

