



Empty Property Management Policy

1 Introduction

1.1 The Empty Property Management Policy sets out Stockport Homes' approach to managing empty (void) residential properties and garages.

1.2 Empty residential properties, including houses and flats, can have a detrimental effect on neighbourhoods, ultimately contributing to some neighbourhoods becoming undesirable and/or unsustainable.

1.3 Garage sites managed by Stockport Homes offer parking solutions which contribute to meeting customer needs and enhance the appearance and sustainability of neighbourhoods. Managing empty garages effectively is essential in achieving this.

1.4 Having properties not tenanted has a negative impact on the financial position of Stockport Homes and prevents or delays customers from being housed into suitable accommodation

1.5 The purpose of this policy is to facilitate an efficient and effective 'turnaround' of empty properties and garages. This process starts as soon as any intention of a tenancy ending is given by a tenant or triggered in some other way and is completed when the property is relet after all identified required repairs have been completed. Some repairs may be completed after the property has been relet and these are 'post relet repairs and new tenants will be informed as to any required post relet repairs.

1.6 By minimising periods when properties are empty, maximising opportunities for direct lets (when there is no void period between one tenancy ending and the next one starting) and utilising any notice periods effectively, void periods and rent loss will be minimised, and customers' needs can be met more efficiently.

2 Effective Tenancy Termination Management

2.1 The tenancy termination process will begin as soon as a notification is received that indicates a property may become empty. The process does not need to wait for a completed tenancy termination form to be received by Stockport Homes. The notification could be received in many ways including, but not limited to:

- Tenant contacting Stockport Homes directly
- Next of kin contacting regarding a deceased tenant
- Neighbourhood Housing Officer or Independent Living Officer notifying that a tenant has abandoned the property
- Customer Finance Officer notifying that an eviction is due to take place.

2.2 The Customer Services Officer is responsible for administering the 'journey' of any void property and records will be kept electronically giving ease of access for all staff involved in the void process.

2.3 The notice period for terminating a tenancy is four weeks (28 calendar days). This date is calculated from the Monday immediately following the date the notice is received in writing, unless the notice is received before 10am and in those instances, that Monday will be used as the start date.

2.4 The exception to the notice period is when Stockport Homes' tenants are transferring to another Stockport Homes managed property or upon the death of the tenant.

- In cases of tenants transferring to another Stockport Homes property, the tenancy will end from the Monday after all keys to the property and a completed tenancy termination form have been received by Stockport Homes
- Upon death, the tenancy will terminate from the Sunday after all keys being received by Stockport Homes. A termination form and death certificate must also be received.

2.5 Rent will remain payable until the tenancy terminates and in cases where keys are surrendered, in the absence of a fully completed tenancy termination form, by someone other than the tenant or the tenant's representative (parent, next of kin or known professional support worker), the property will be treated as abandoned and the Neighbourhood Housing Officer/Independent Living Officer must take the appropriate action. Guidance can be found in the Estates and Neighbourhood Management Policy.

2.6 Upon the death of the sole tenant, if there is no known next of kin or relative, the tenancy will need to be legally terminated through an appropriate method.

- In these cases, the Neighbourhood Housing Officer/Independent Living Officer will manage the process to bring the tenancy to an end and will liaise with the Property Management Team regarding the property.

2.7 All tenants who are permitted to transfer to another Stockport Homes managed property will have a transfer inspection completed prior to being permitted a move. Transfers will only be permitted following a satisfactory property inspection demonstrating that the current property is in a good state of repair and cleanliness, reducing the need for any costly or lengthy void works.

- In cases where 50 social need points are awarded, recognising an emergency / urgent need for rehousing, the Neighbourhood Housing Officer will be asked to complete a property inspection at the same time as the 50 social need points being awarded. In these instances, poor property condition will not prohibit a transfer taking place, however the Neighbourhood Housing Officer will work to address any property issues in advance of a physical property offer being made, for example, starting to reduce a large rent arrears debt or commencing work to resolve rechargeable repairs. Tenants' safety will always take precedent in these cases.

2.8 Upon receiving notification that a property is likely to become empty, the Customer Service Officer will place the property in the next available Homechoice advert, unless there is a clear reason why this should not happen, for example, recently deceased tenant and next of kin not yet informed. All properties must be advertised at the earliest possible opportunity.

3 Role of the Repair Contractor

3.1 On receipt of keys for a new void property, Three Sixty will organise the following:

- An asbestos survey (arranged through the Compliance and Building Safety Team) if one is not available on the portal
- An electrical inspection
- Gas decommissions.

3.2 Three Sixty will visit all void properties within 24 hours of receipt of the keys and will also complete the following processes:

- Install a suited lock cylinder or key safe allowing ease of access for key stakeholders
- Take meter readings and details which are entered directly to a portal for the utility management company
- Request any required property clearance and/or bio clean
- Provide an initial inspection of the property
- Make any referral for post letting capital works to the Assets Team
- Request a Technical Surveyor inspects the property if there are significant high-cost repairs or structural defects, authorising any work that exceeds the agreed approval limit of Three Sixty
- Request the operative or sub-contractor completes a schedule of works
- Raise work orders on the repairs system
- Completion of works
- Completion of a water risk assessment
- Provide a new set of keys and handover certificate
- Update the Void monitoring System on CX
- Manage all documents and photographs associated with void properties linked to repair activities.

3.3 Some void properties will be allocated to alternative contractors for completion, for example if they require large scale works. In such instances, these may be passed to B4Box who are the social value partner for Stockport Homes, utilising larger voids to provide training opportunities.

3.4 When void properties are allocated to a partner contractor, they will complete the schedule of works required and submit this to Three Sixty for approval. They will then carry out all works including legionella assessment.

3.5 All contractors working on void properties must adhere to relevant guidance and rules set by Three Sixty as part of the contract for working on empty properties. This will be monitored by Three Sixty.

3.6 When all repairs are completed, a post inspection will be carried out, a percentage of which will have a post inspection by a supervisor. For all returned and completed properties, the property will be returned to Stockport Homes in a clean and lettable condition with a handover certificate confirming the property meets the Property Condition Standards.

4 Achieving Excellent Performance

4.1 Monitoring void properties throughout the life of the void ensures that maximum performance is achieved, and void periods and void rent loss are minimised.

4.2 Daily monitoring reports track each void property, including properties where there has been notification received that a void property is likely. All staff involved in void property management, including Customer Services Officers, Void Officers and Three Sixty, will track performance of the void for each stage of the process. Monitoring includes, but is not limited to:

- Calendar days void
- Keys received from outgoing tenant to handover for repairs
- Keys received from Repairs as 'ready to let' to tenancy sign-up date
- Calendar days for asbestos checks.

4.3 Direct let's arise when a tenancy terminates, and a new tenancy starts the following day resulting in a zero day void. Maximising opportunities for direct lets is achieved through prioritising any voids for repairs and sign-ups when a direct let is identified as being achievable.

4.4 Some properties will require post relet works after a new tenancy has started. These will be identified to the new tenant at the point of the new tenancy sign-up taking place. These could include some minor void repairs but also some planned capital improvement type works. Completing these works after the tenancy has started will minimise any impact on void performance and void rent loss, whilst also giving the tenant the opportunity to move quickly into their new home and in many cases, enabling them to be part of any choice offered within the capital improvement programme.

5 Rechargeable Repairs

5.1 Stockport Homes tenants have the responsibility to repair any damage caused by themselves or visitors to their homes under the terms of their Tenancy Agreement. For repairs in void properties which have been attributed to the previous tenant, these will be recharged. Examples are property clearances, rubbish removal or for any repairs arising from abuse or neglect. Full details can be found in the Home Repairs Policy.

6 Offering and Allocating Properties

6.1 All properties will be shortlisted the following day after the Homechoice advert they are featured in closes. Adverts currently open weekly from Thursday at Midnight and close on Tuesdays at 23:59pm.

6.2 The Customer Service Officer will shortlist the property using Abritas and will offer the property to the applicant at the top of the shortlist. All offers are provisional until the point of a tenancy sign-up taking place. Customers will be contacted on the same day as the shortlist being run, except for those being offered adapted properties whereas offers will be made within 48 hours. All customers will be contacted by telephone, unless there is no telephone number available. Text messages and emails can also be sent including following any specific contact instruction given by the customer within their Homechoice application.

6.3 Customers will always be encouraged to respond to an offer immediately and where this is not possible, for example if the offer has been made via email or letter, the applicants will be given 48 hours from receiving the offer to make a decision.

6.4 For any customer living in Stockport Homes temporary accommodation, the Customer Service Officer will inform the Scheme Manager of the offer who will visit the customer to advise of the offer and to get an immediate response.

6.5 In exceptional circumstances, for example for properties that customers do not bid for but are 'withheld' for them to meet a specific urgency, such as a property with full adaptations or an offer to a family who are experiencing serious anti-social behaviour, the option to extend the response time is the responsibility of the Head of Property Management or the Customer Services Manager. For further information on withheld offers, please refer to the Allocations Policy.

6.6 As soon as properties are free from any health and safety repairs or checks, the Voids Officer will complete an accompanied viewing with the customer. A risk assessment is completed at the viewing by the Voids Officer to ensure all known information about the applicant is still correct. Most viewings will take place whilst properties are still undergoing repairs and customers will be advised of anything outstanding. Completing viewings before the property is ready to let is a key factor in achieving good performance and prompt turnaround times.

7 Adapted Properties and Manual Offers

7.1 For any fully adapted properties, these will not be advertised through Homechoice but, will be allocated by the Adapted Property Panel. Stockport Homes' Occupational Therapist will advise the Customer Service Officer of who to offer these properties to and will accompany the customer on the

accompanied viewing or will assess the property independently of the customer visiting to ensure it meets their medical circumstances.

7.2 For properties with one or minor adaptations, these will be advertised and allocated through Homechoice, and all medical assessments will be verified prior to the offer ensuring that any recognised medical need is being met through the property offer. Customers will not be permitted to move into a property that does not meet their recognised medical need.

7.3 In line with the Allocations Policy and to meet emergency or exceptional housing circumstances which cannot be met through the Choice Based Lettings and points process, some empty properties will not be advertised, and a direct offer will be made.

- All direct offer applications will be approved through Special Housing Panel, through the award of 50 social need points or through an agreed rehousing protocol with SMBC, for example care leavers
- Please see the Allocations Policy for further information regarding the withheld process and Special Housing Panel.

8 Property Sign-Up

8.1 All customers, including existing Stockport Homes tenants, must have a sign-up before a new tenancy commences.

8.2 The Property Management Team will book applicants who have accepted the property after a viewing in for a tenancy sign-up. These will be planned using the expected completion date of any void repairs. The communication between the teams involved in void management is essential in keeping applicants updated should the sign-up date need to be amended and brought forward or delayed.

8.3 A sign-up takes place to ensure that customers understand that by signing a Tenancy Agreement (which is a legally binding document) they understand the rights and responsibilities associated with the tenancy. The customer is committing to upholding the obligations within it, such as payment of rent and charges and around not contributing to anti-social behaviour. The Tenancy Agreement must be completed correctly and signed by the customer.

8.4 The sign-up process enables Stockport Homes to work with the customer to ensure they have the knowledge and understanding of how they can successfully live in their home and ensure the tenancy is sustainable. It is also another opportunity to identify any support needs and ensure that these are being met, if support is not already in place.

8.5 The sign-up is also used to communicate essential property information to the new customer whilst ensuring that all customers/households with identified additional needs have the relevant support put into place to aid tenancy success.

8.6 Sign-ups are arranged on the date that the keys are expected to be returned from the contractor. This can be face to face in Cornerstone, digitally via Pandadoc (providing the tenant has an email address) or over the telephone, where the tenancy pack is to be collected the same day.

- In some cases only a face to face appointment will be offered, for example, when needing an interpreter or other support during the appointment.

8.7 Where there is a delay in the sign-up process due to the customer being unavailable for any reason, the Customer Services Manager or Head of Property Management will determine the appropriate course of action. This may include either:

- Refusing the offer due to the customer's unavailability or lack of response, or
- Proceeding with the sign-up at a later date, with the tenancy start date backdated accordingly.

8.8 In addition to the Tenancy Agreement and other standard items that are covered within sign-ups, it will also be used to explain any relevant information for example, welfare reform changes, reinvestment works for example sprinkler installation. All sign-ups, excluding those for full rent payers, will include the Money Advice Service.

8.9 The sign-up will always take into consideration a customer's personal circumstances; however void turnaround time and the demand and supply of properties are a focus for Stockport Homes.

8.10 Stockport Homes aims to turn around properties quickly to minimise rent loss and to ensure sustainable neighbourhoods.

9 Offering and Allocating Garages

9.1 Stockport Homes manages over 1,100 garages across the Stockport borough. Garages are a valuable resource to help manage parking issues within neighbourhoods and offer residents alternative parking options.

9.2 Anyone who lives or works in Stockport, can apply for a garage.

9.3 Applications to rent a garage can be made by any person, however priority for available garages will always be given to Stockport Homes' tenants and leaseholders, subject to qualifying criteria. Tenants/ leaseholders who already rent a garage will be considered after all other applications have been exhausted.

9.4 Garages should be used to store a functioning motor vehicle and details of the vehicle will be obtained as part of the application process and rechecked at the sign-up appointment. However, in exceptional circumstances, the garage



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may be let for storage of other legitimate items that are not combustible. Priority will always be given to the storage of a motor vehicle.

9.5 Garages rented to customers who have a tenancy or leasehold agreement managed by Stockport Homes (whether a Stockport Council or Stockport Homes property) are not subject to VAT. However, the rental on all garages let to customers who do not have a tenancy or leasehold agreement managed by Stockport Homes will be subject to VAT.

9.6 Garage applications forms are available online at <https://www.homechoicestockport.org/content/Information2/Garages>. Any customer requiring assistance in completing an application can visit Stockport Homes reception at Cornerstone and 'how to' support is also available at the above link.

10 Internal Controls

1	Version control	Version number will change every three years or at major review	
	Version No.	Date	Change/s and reasons for change
	1	August 2025	Review of existing policy, which now includes the Sign-Up and Garage Allocation policies.

2	Policy Owner i.e. Director	Director of Customer Services
	Policy Author/s i.e. Head of Service	Head of Property Management
	Approved by/date	Customer Services Management Meeting – 14 th October 2025 – Decision
	Communication	Team Meeting
	Effective Date - the date of sign-off	14 th October 2025
	Next Full Review Date i.e. 3 years after effective date, with an annual light touch review	13 th October 2028

3	Regulatory Standards	Please list the Consumer, Governance, Viability standards and outcomes this policy meets
	Standard/s	Required outcome
	Tenancy Standard	<p><u>1.1 Allocation and Lettings</u> 1.1.1 Registered providers must allocate and let their homes in a fair and transparent way that takes the needs of tenants and prospective tenants into account.</p> <p><u>1.2 Tenancy Sustainment and evictions</u> 1.1.2 Registered providers must support tenants to maintain their tenancy or licence. Where a registered provider ends a tenancy or licence, they must offer affected tenants advice and assistance.</p> <p><u>1.3 Tenure</u> 1.3.1 Registered providers shall offer tenancies or terms of occupation which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of their housing stock. 1.3.2 They shall meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements or terms of occupation.</p>

<p>Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard</p>	<p>Registered providers must communicate with tenants and supply information so tenants can use landlord services, understand what to expect from their landlord, and hold their landlord to account.</p> <p><u>1.1 Fairness and respect</u></p> <p>1.1.1 Registered providers must treat tenants and prospective tenants with fairness and respect.</p> <p><u>1.2 Diverse needs</u></p> <p>1.2.1 In relation to the housing and landlord services they provide, registered providers must take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants and, where relevant, prospective tenants.</p>
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<p>4 Linked policies/strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Management Strategy • Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy • Safer Neighbourhoods Policy • Tenancy Management Policy • Estates and Neighbourhood Management Policy • Abandoned Vehicles Procedure • Tenancy Breaches Procedures • Stockport Council's Allocations Policy • Property Condition Standard • Home Repairs Policy • Delivery Plan 2021-2026
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<p>5 Equality, diversity and inclusion</p>	<p>Describe how different experiences, characteristics, and approaches were considered during the formulation of the policy, e.g. neurodiversity, age, religion, sex/gender, financial/digital inclusion.</p> <p>Where some differential negative impact has been identified, mitigating actions have been put into place. This includes ensuring that any vulnerable customers have adequate time to view and sign-up for a property. Viewings can be completed in person or virtually if required.</p> <p>Properties that are allocated to customers in sheltered housing schemes or fully adapted properties will be subject to decoration when void if required and other customers can be offered decorating vouchers giving them choice in how to decorate their new home.</p> <p>Staff involved in void management will ensure that any correspondence with customers is in the format</p>
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		most suitable to them. Assistance can also be given to any person who wishes to apply for a garage by a member of the Property Management Team. Garages are a limited resource, and priority will always be given to current Stockport Homes' tenants to help ease parking congestion in neighbourhoods.
6	Colleague Voice	Describe how the customer and/or colleague voice shapes and influences the policy and services
		Customer voice has been used to agree the Property Condition Standard for all empty homes. In addition, feedback from customers through the 'Moving In' survey aims to understand any emerging negative trends or concerns linked to the above processes, enabling corrective action or procedure re-evaluation to take place.
7	Risk management	This policy helps to mitigate the following risks identified on the Corporate Risk Register
	Corporate Risk 1	Stockport Homes is not adequately prepared for a proactive inspection of the Consumer Standards by the Regulator of Social Housing
	Corporate Risk 2	SHG does not maintain a strong, positive reputation where stakeholders have trust and confidence in SHG, including partners in Stockport and across GM
	Corporate Risk 6	SHG does not deliver excellent customer services in the way that customers require them
8	Performance monitoring	Please list the relevant government TSMs (Tenant Satisfaction Measures)
		<p>Corporate Scorecard KPI Average days to Relet</p> <p>TSM Satisfaction: TP01 - Overall satisfaction TP06 - Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them TP07 - Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them TP08 - Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect TP11 - Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to Neighbourhoods</p>