



THE EMPTY HOME LETTABLE STANDARD

North West Leicestershire District Council is responsible for allocating empty Council owned homes.

The Empty Home Lettable Standard has been agreed in consultation with the tenants of North West Leicestershire District Council.

The purpose of this document is to ensure that a consistent, minimum lettable standard is achieved and that all our properties are offered in a good state of repair and are safe and secure.

The appropriate level of funding will be utilised for any properties we choose to let. In addition this standard is designed to ensure that no unnecessary expenditure is incurred.

The overarching requirement is that all properties let are:-

Safe
Clean
In good working order

This guide is directed toward all officers and stakeholders who carry out empty home inspections and sets out the standard to which empty homes should be inspected, repaired and offered to new tenants.

The purpose of the standard is to ensure the Council provides good quality properties for incoming tenants which are suitable to their needs. It also assists in understanding the cost of works required and the time that the repairs may take.

The guide allows flexibility in how it is achieved and to what timescale. It therefore does not require that all works have to be completed before the new tenant moves in – if this work will delay letting and is of a minor nature or there is adequate provision until a new item is fitted (ie a new front door, where the old one is serviceable for a short period).

The new tenant will be advised of, and must agree to this follow on work during viewing and/or during sign-up. Otherwise the work must be carried out whilst the property is empty.

The guide does not cover empty homes where major repairs are required to be undertaken, defined as those which, if the property were occupied, would require the Tenant to be decanted.

These works include;

- Large or complicated structural works to include floors, walls and roofs.
- Large amounts of asbestos removal.
- Works as a result of a major fire or flood.
- Major damp proofing.
- Major internal layout re-design.

Vandalism and break-ins

Any acts of vandalism while a property is empty will be reported to the Police. Whilst we are aware of the difficulties in pursuing the perpetrators of these acts, notifying the Police will allow accurate monitoring of these offences.

Initial Administration on receipt of keys

Keys received

Once the keys to the property have been received from Housing Management the property is logged on Capita as being with the Repairs team.

The property is first made safe prior to any inspection or works being carried out.

Safety Checks

Gas

The initial gas checks are carried out as soon as the keys are received by the repairs team. The keys are passed to the IRT supervisor to carry out the following checks and works:-

- The gas meter type is checked, and where this is a normal meter the checks can be carried out immediately.
- If the meter is a card meter with credit on it the checks can be carried out immediately.
- If the meter is a credit meter but has no credit on it, a pin number is obtained from the gas supplier, the card is then credited and the checks can then be carried out.
- The gas boiler is labelled to say the checks have been carried out.
- High level stadium vents for open flued appliances are checked and left in working order.

The checks:

The gas operative runs the boiler to make sure it is operating and working correctly. Once it is established that it is in good working condition it is capped off and the Landlords Gas Safety Record (LGSR) completed for inclusion in the empty home pack. The heating system is then drained down to prevent frost damage in winter and water damage from break-ins for pipe theft.

Electric

The initial electrical checks are also carried out as soon as the keys are received by the repairs team.

The keys are passed to the IRT supervisor to carry out the following checks and works to ensure the electrical system is safe and the property is safe to work in:-

- The electric meter type is checked, and where this is a normal meter the checks can be carried out immediately.
- If the meter is a card meter with credit on it the checks can be carried out immediately.
- If the meter is a credit meter but has no credit on it, a pin number is obtained from the electric supplier, the card is then credited and the checks can then be carried out.
- The consumer unit is labelled to say the checks have been carried out.

The checks:

- A visual check of the sockets, lights, switches is carried out first, followed by the incoming supply, earth cabling the meter and the earth cabling.
- The earth bonding of the electric system and water pipes is then inspected.
- Loft areas, accessible void areas, the external perimeter and any sheds are all visually inspected.
- Any previous electrical condition reports are checked.
- Tests are then carried out of the live electrical systems; consumer unit; RCD and equipment; and each individual circuits.
- The consumer unit is labelled with the date tested and the date the next test is due.
- The electrical condition report is completed for inclusion in the empty home pack.

Solid Fuel Appliances

- The operative carries out a general check of the appliance to include doors, seals and bars. The flue should also be checked for blockages and swept as appropriate.
- High level stadium vents for open flued appliances are checked and left in working order.
- Checks will be made to ensure that a working CO Detector is in place and a replacement provided where necessary.

Water Services

- During cold periods we ensure the water service is switched off and systems are drained down.
- As part of the empty home re-instatement stop taps will be accessible and locations clearly marked for the incoming tenants.

Property administration packs

The Repairs Team Leader prepares the administration pack, including:-

- The property details form.
- Electrical test certificate.
- LGSR gas certificate.
- Asbestos report.
- 3 sets of keys for the front and back doors.
- 2 sets of keys for any outbuildings or sheds.

The general guidelines for the inspection

The lettable standard is based around the criteria of

Safe

Clean

In good working order

The brief for the Maintenance Officer is to inspect the exterior and interior of the property and to carry out the repairs needed to bring the property up to a satisfactory standard of repair – safe, clean and in good working order.

Follow on work

Certain minor repair or replacement works may be identified that need to be carried out once the property is tenanted (follow on work) to avoid delaying the re-letting.

These items will be noted on the inspection form, orders raised and the incoming tenant made aware of the works and the expected completion date, when signing for the tenancy.

The inspection process

The initial part of the empty home inspection is an assessment of the major elements externally and then within the property:- Roof, walls, windows, doors, drainage, rainwater goods, kitchen, bathroom, electrical wiring and heating system. These items will be inspected to ascertain their condition, against the safe clean and good working order criteria.

This is then followed by a detailed inspection of each room to record all the required repairs and re-instatement works.

Pests and Infestations

Any visible infestations, with the exception of ants, will have treatment commenced during the period that the property is void.

Investment programme work

The Maintenance Officer will check the upcoming 12 months investment programme for any major element replacements - kitchens, bathrooms, electrical wiring, heating systems,

doors and windows and, where possible, arrange for their completion whilst the property is empty.

If these major elements have failed but are not on the investment programme the work will again be carried out whilst the property is empty.

Recharges

The removal of existing unwanted outgoing tenants goods is always a rechargeable repair to the outgoing tenant. It is at the discretion of the maintenance officer to decide whether or not to leave any floor coverings in the property, depending upon their condition.

Laminate flooring in flats above ground floor will be removed.

Front and rear doors

Front and rear doors to the property (excluding communal areas) will have their locks changed. Outbuildings not attached to the property will not have locks changed. Locks are recycled for use on other properties.

The Internal Inspection

The Interior

Internal doors

All internal doors and door furniture should operate smoothly and latches engage properly. Small holes are unlikely to have damaged the integrity of the door and will be filled; bigger holes will necessitate door replacement.

Windows

Windows will open, close and lock (were locks fitted) properly and securely, broken glazing will be replaced. There will be no excessive gaps around closed windows, and all seals will be in tact and serviceable.

Replacement of misted double glazed units will not be undertaken at empty home stage but the details will be noted with the works added to the deferred work list for completion at a later date, subject to appropriate funding being available.

Walls and ceilings generally

The property will tested for any structural dampness and any remedial works carried out to damp courses. All walls and ceilings will be made free from all signs of previous rising damp or lifestyle related condensation.

Polystyrene ceiling tiles will be removed from any room as these are a fire hazard.

Existing textured finishes on ceilings and walls will be left in place, except where it is damaged. In the case of damaged textured finishes our asbestos policy will be adhered to.

Plastering

All plasterwork to walls and ceilings will be tested and will be left in good condition, not loose and free from any holes larger than 25mmx 25mm, or cracks greater than 3mm.

All surfaces will be repaired so as to be in a sound condition for the age of the property, with no missing or damaged areas or loose sections of plaster.

There will be no gaps to the plaster finishing around sockets, switches or door and window frames.

Floors

Floor areas will be tested for any structural dampness or rot and any minor remedial works carried out to damp proof membranes or floor structure.

All floor boards will be fixed and level and any broken boards replaced. There will not be a gap between floorboards of more than 10mm.

Concrete floors will be clean and reasonably dust free, and left in such a condition that a floor covering may be applied by the incoming tenant.

Carpet grippers will be removed from entrance doorways, thresholds and stair treads to avoid injury.

Stairs /Landings

Stair treads and risers will be in sound condition and securely fixed, free from splits and rot, banisters and handrails will be in place, be securely fixed and free from damage.

Smoke detectors

NWLDC fits 1 smoke detector in a flat, and 2 in a house. Testing of the smoke detectors is completed at the specification visit and will be recorded on the empty home information available.

The Kitchen

A minimum of 1 x double kitchen sink unit; 1 x double base unit; 1 x single wall unit will be provided, unless the property has a pantry which will reduce the minimum number of units to 1 x double kitchen sink unit; 1 x double base unit.

Where a new sink unit is installed, a [sure stop](#), or similar isolator valve will be fitted to the incoming main to allow the water supply to be isolated and prevent excessive damage being caused in the event of a leak.

Kitchen units will have doors that open and close correctly and are in a serviceable condition

Stainless steel sink-tops will only be replaced if there is significant damage. Significant damage would mean the sink is not in a useable condition.

Kitchen taps will be serviceable and be free from leaks. Where taps are renewed in supported properties, these will be replaced with lever type taps.

A sink plug and chain will also be in place.

There will be minimum of 300mm of worktop space either side of the cooker area.

There will be a minimum of two rows of tiled splash back fitted to worktops.

Provision will be made for a utility supply of either gas or electricity within the kitchen; this will depend upon the amount of space in the kitchen.

Washing machine connections will not be provided unless a new sink unit is installed and space allows. Certain kitchens will currently not allow provision for a washing machine due to their size/layout.

Any new sink unit, with suitable space will be fitted with washing machine taps and waste connection. A cut out for washing machine pipe work will be provided in the side panel of the sink unit.

Existing connections previously fitted will be left if serviceable or replaced if beyond economic repair.

No washing machine connection will be supplied if there is a laundry room facility provided within the building.

The Bathroom

We will provide a new toilet seat for each new tenant.

The WC pan will be clean and free from cracks or chips either in the pan or around the rim. The WC cistern will flush and the WC pan will be adequately secured to the floor and be level.

Bath and basin taps will be serviceable, with acceptable pressure and be free from leaks. Where taps are renewed in supported properties, these will be replaced with lever type taps.

The bath and basin will have a plug and chain installed and the bath will be free from cracks or large chips. Small enamel chips in baths will be repaired at the discretion of the Maintenance Officer.

There will be at least two rows of tiled splash back to the bath and basin, providing the basin is not directly below a window, in which case one row may have to be fitted. All mastic seals will be in good condition

If a shower is fitted, the shower components including riser, hose, head and screen will be in good condition. Any tiling that is installed will be adequate for shower use.

Internal decoration

Existing decoration will be left intact wherever possible if it is deemed to be clean and in good condition, although it may not be to the incoming tenants taste.

Decorating vouchers may be made available to the incoming tenants; however, this allowance is not an automatic right and will not apply in every case or for every part of the home. The allowance is awarded on a room by room basis depending on the condition of the decoration, up to the maximum allowance stated in the Decorating Allowance Policy.

Where any decoration is in poor condition the Maintenance Officer will arrange for the affected areas to be redecorated during the empty home period.

The Housing Officer will discuss and agree the allowance for each property with the incoming Tenant during the accompanied viewing.

Switches, light fittings and sockets

These will all be in good condition, working, securely fixed, free from cracks, damage and paint splashes.

Radiators, pipework and heaters

These will all be in good condition, working, securely fixed, free from damage, and paint splashes.

Cleaning

On completion of all works the property will be cleaned and made ready for the incoming tenant. The agreed cleaning schedule is as follows:

- Skirting boards to be wiped and dusted
- Doors and frames to be wiped and dusted
- Window frames and sills to be wiped and dusted
- Window glass to be cleaned inside
- Plug/light sockets and light fittings to be wiped and dusted
- Air vents to be wiped and dusted.
- All cobwebs to be removed
- Fireplaces to be wiped and dusted.
- All floors to be swept and vinyl flooring mopped.
- All glazed tiling surfaces to be wiped down.
- All kitchen units to be wiped down.
- All sanitary units to be wiped down (i.e. bath, sink, shower, toilet).

The External Inspection

The roof will be watertight with no missing ridge tiles, missing flashing, slipped or missing roof tiles, damaged gutters, missing stop ends or cracked down pipes. All gutters and rain water pipes will be free from blockages and debris.

All waste pipes will be watertight, securely fixed and free from blockages

Due to the external nature of the types of work mentioned, any repairs will be recorded and work may be arranged with the rest of the reinstatement work or may be done once the property is occupied. Any blockages will always be cleared during the empty home works.

Gardens will be cleared of all rubbish and unwanted possessions. However under normal circumstances no landscaping will be carried out except for areas required for access such as pathways and around external doors.

Rubbish includes waste of any type. The property is accepted as seen and any further remedial works to the garden are the responsibility of the tenant. If the garden is in an exceptionally poor state we will carry out remedial works. Decision regarding the condition of the garden will be made by the Maintenance Officer.

The Maintenance officer will decide whether or not any garden tidy is to take place based on the condition of the garden and the ability of the incoming tenant to undertake the required works themselves. If the incoming tenant is not known by the end of the empty home period, this decision is to be made by the Officer completing the accompanied viewing.

Fencing

North West Leicestershire District Council is responsible for boundary fencing only. Boundary fencing "Refers to fencing which marks out the extent of the land owned by the council not including dividing fencing, but including fences where they adjoin a public footpath or open area." *

*Definition taken from tenancy agreement

The Council will not replace fencing unless it adjoins public footpaths or open areas as stated above. Any damaged fencing that we are not responsible for will be made safe or removed.

Clarification on the boundary can be gained from Housing Management staff either at settling in visits or throughout the tenancy.

Outbuildings

All brick outbuildings will be structurally safe and clear of all rubbish, debris, waste and unwanted possessions. The buildings must have a working door and lock. Gas and Electric checks will include any outbuildings.

Outbuildings do not include wooden sheds.

Before handing the keys to Housing Management, the Inspecting Officer is to view the property to ensure all works have been completed to a satisfactory standard and that details of any further work required are noted and raised accordingly.

Services commissioning at new tenant sign up

Commissioning the gas, electric and solid fuel utilities:

During the sign-up, the incoming tenant is advised that they must inform the utility companies that they are the new tenants and have registered for the provision of the utility to allow for appliance commissioning.

The new tenant must also contact the Council's Scheduling Team as soon as practicable to request the commissioning of the heating and electrical systems in the property. Once this arrangement is made, The IRT operative attends the property carries out a full test of the heating, hot water and Electrical system to ensure it is left fully operational and services/commissions the appliances and, where required issues a Landlords Gas Safety

Certificate (LGSR). A copy of this is left with the new Tenant, the records are updated on the Capita repairs system and the document filed by the Planned Investment Team who administer the gas/solid fuel contracts.

The commissioning of the heating and electrical systems will be completed within 2 working days of tenancy commencement. The commissioning of the heating and electrical systems will also include providing instructions on the safe and correct usage of the heating and electrical appliances.

On completion of the re-instatement works

The property will be inspected by the Maintenance Officer to confirm that the empty home standard has been adhered to and achieved

The Repairs Team Leader will complete all the paperwork in preparation for the handover, with the keys, to Housing Management.

The paperwork includes:

- The property details form.
- List of any follow on work ordered.
- List of investment work due in the next 12 months.
- Landlords Gas Safety Record.
- Electrical Test Certificate.
- Asbestos report and record.
- Certificate of cleaning.

Photographs (signed by the maintenance Officer to say tested/witnessed) of:-

- CO detector.
- Label on the boiler.
- Label on the consumer unit.
- Smoke alarm(s).

Monitoring and Evaluation

New tenant survey

It is important to ensure that the standard is consistently adhered to and that it is, and remains, acceptable for the majority of our tenants. Therefore a survey form will be issued to all new tenants in order to obtain feedback on the standard of repair and cleanliness of the property when it is let.

Tenant empty home inspectors

In addition to this, a percentage of the properties will be inspected by our tenant empty home inspectors as a way of further monitoring the performance.

The lettable standard will be reviewed on a regular basis and the feedback from the surveys and the tenant void inspectors will be considered as part of the review process.

NWLDC Void Standard re-drafted version December 2015.	
Version control: V1 J. Coulton	Dated: 13 th January 2016

Appendix 1: Check list for inspections and quality control checks.

All of the following areas are to be checked to make sure that they comply with the standard detailed above.

KITCHEN

- Sink plug is fitted with a chain
- Cold feed supply for washing machine (N/A for sheltered schemes)
- Washing machine waste outlet
- Stop tap accessible (tested to make sure operational)
- Minimum 2 rows of tiles around length of work surfaces and sealed
- All cupboard doors, shelves, draw fronts intact and operational
- Works surfaces free from scratches/deep staining
- Sink taps fixed securely and operational

BATHROOM

- Bath and WHB plugs fitted with chains
- Bath/WHB Taps operational
- Bathroom suite free from scratches and chips
- New toilet seat fitted
- Minimum 2 rows tiles to WHB and Bath
- New curtain if shower fitted
- New shower head and hose (where shower is fitted)
- WC flushes and operates with no leaks

GENERAL ITEMS TO ALL ROOMS

- Internal decorations are free from graffiti, damp, mould, major stains, lifting or tears in the wallpaper.
- Plastered finished walls will be free from defects; all holes filled and finished flush to allow for decorations.
- All windows where applicable should open and close with no faults and keys provided
- Floors will be sound and free from significant defects, floorboards will have no major gaps of more than 10mm
- Stairs, handrails and balustrades will be safe and sound
- Roof space is free from rubbish and unwanted belongings
- No broken or cracked glazing
- Property has been cleaned to a satisfactory standard (See Cleaning Section)
- All Internal doors/door furniture operate smoothly and latches engage
- No broken/loose electrical fittings (sockets, switches, light fittings)
- Radiators, pipe work and Boiler solidly fixed
- Curtain battens are fitted to each room
- Window boards are free from scratches, dents, staining

GAS, ELECTRIC AND OTHER SERVICES

- Consumer unit clearly labelled to BS 7671 Regulations
- Central heating boiler clearly labelled
- Fire and smoke detection equipment is in good working order
- C/O Detection installed where open flue appliance
- Electrical and Gas certification in pack
- Solid Fuel Certification (If solid fuel Installed)
- Fans operational in good working order (where fitted)

OUTSIDE THE PROPERTY

- Outbuildings free from rubbish/unwanted belongings
- No missing or loose roof tiles
- Drains/ Gullies are free from blockages
- There is no DIY lighting/electrical items fixed to the structure
- Garden is free from rubbish/unwanted belongings and dog mess
- The fencing that is fitted is secure and in good condition
- If a side gate is fitted, it is secure and in good condition
- Pathways are free from trips and hazards (front, side ,rear)