



VACANT HOMES POLICY

REVIEW DATE: MAY 2029



1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Community Gateway Association (CGA) recognises the value that the provision of a good-quality home has on the quality of our tenants' lives and their health and well-being. CGA is committed to managing our vacant homes efficiently to maximise the number of applicants who can access housing when they need it, minimise rent loss and ensure new tenants are provided with a home that is safe, secure, and well-maintained.

- 1.2 CGA aims to provide homes that meet tenant-informed standards, comply with legal requirements, make the best use of available housing, protect the value of our properties, and provide good value for tenants. Tenants also have responsibilities when moving out, including giving notice, returning the property clean, tidy, and in good order, and promptly reporting any damage, so that homes can be prepared quickly and safely for the next tenant.

2.0 Receiving notice from outgoing tenant

- 2.1 Tenants are required to give written notice to terminate their tenancy, in accordance with the terms set out in their tenancy agreement.

- 2.2 CGA may initially accept verbal notice, but tenants must complete the formal termination paperwork to officially end their tenancy. Where tenants may need support due to health, vulnerability, or other circumstances, CGA will provide appropriate assistance to help them complete the process.

- 2.3 In certain cases, a shorter notice period may be agreed, for example, when a tenant is transferring to another CGA property or is moving to one of our Choice Based Lettings partners, as outlined in the Select Move Policy.

- 2.4 Once notice has been received from the tenant, CGA will arrange a home visit to carry out an exit interview and understand their reasons for moving.

- 2.5 During the visit, the condition of the property will be checked. The tenant will be advised of any repairs or issues that are considered beyond normal wear and tear and informed of any actions they need to complete before vacating. Tenants will also be made aware that charges may apply for unresolved issues, although CGA may decide not to charge in some circumstances.
- 2.6 Tenants must leave the property, including external and shared areas, clean and tidy, remove all belongings and rubbish, and return all keys on or before the end of the notice period. Charges may apply if cleaning or clearing is needed because the property is not left in an acceptable condition.

3.0 Ending the Tenancy

- 3.1 Where a tenant returns the keys and has completed the relevant termination paperwork earlier than the given expiry of the notice, CGA will accept this as a surrender of tenancy by mutual agreement. The notice period end date will remain in effect.
- 3.2 Tenants are responsible for returning all keys to CGA on the agreed date at the end of the notice period. Late keys may result in additional rent charges in line with the tenancy agreement.
- 3.3 Where termination paperwork is received without the keys, CGA may change the property's locks to gain access. CGA reserves the right to charge for the lock change in these cases.
- 3.4 Where CGA suspects a property has been abandoned, the Abandoned Tenancy Procedure will be followed.

4.0 Keeping the Property Secure

- 4.1 CGA takes a number of steps to keep vacant homes secure, including minimising the time they are empty, maintaining the appearance of occupation,

displaying security warnings where appropriate, and carrying out regular inspections.

- 4.2 Alarms may be installed in properties where a security risk has been identified.
- 4.3 In certain cases, shutters may also be installed where a property is at higher risk, but this will only be done where necessary to prevent damage or unauthorised occupation.

5.0 Preparing the Home

- 5.1 CGA will inspect vacant homes promptly to identify any work needed. All properties will meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard and CGA's own minimum vacant home standard, which has been agreed with tenants (Appendix B).
- 5.2 All properties will undergo health and safety checks as part of the vacant homes process, in accordance with CGA's compliance procedures and the Keeping Your Home Safe Policy. Checks include, but are not limited to gas, electrical systems, legionella, asbestos, fire safety, and assessments to ensure the property is free from damp and mould. Electric vehicle chargers will also be inspected as part of the electrical safety testing (where relevant).
- 5.3 In buildings with shared water supplies, such as The Watermills, The Atrium, and The Courtyards (this is not an exhaustive list), the vacant home will be flushed weekly in line with the building's water safety management plan, and a record of each flush will be maintained.
- 5.4 The decoration of the property will be assessed to ensure it meets our vacant home standard. Where decoration work is required, CGA may carry out the work or offer decoration vouchers to the incoming tenant. CGA will take into

account the incoming tenants' individual circumstances when making this decision.

- 5.5 For homes that are harder to let, incentives such as carpets, enhanced decoration, or other market incentives may be offered.
- 5.6 CGA may use the period the property is vacant to carry out any work that may cause major disruption or may be difficult to complete once the property is occupied, such as major or programmed improvement works.
- 5.7 Where extensive works are identified, CGA will undertake an options appraisal to consider whether completing the works provides value for money, or whether an alternative such as sale/disposal is a more viable option.
- 5.8 CGA recognises that in certain cases, adaptations to the property may be required to support the tenant's needs and changing circumstances. To make the most efficient use of existing facilities, CGA will not routinely remove adaptations from vacant homes and will, where possible, aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants who need them, in line with our Adaptations Policy.
- 5.9 All work to the vacant home will be undertaken by CGA's Gateway PropertyCare Team or its contractors and post inspected to ensure work is completed to a satisfactory standard in relation to time, quality, and value for money.

6.0 Handing over of the new property

- 6.1 Before the new tenant moves in, CGA will ensure the water supply/system is flushed and a record will be kept of the preventative action undertaken in accordance with the Keeping Your Home Safe Policy.
- 6.2 CGA will undertake testing of the smoke detection and carbon monoxide (CO) detection systems in accordance with the Fire Safety Procedures and Gas Procedures.

6.3 CGA will carry out checks to ensure no damp and mould has occurred while the property has been vacant. Where damp and mould is identified, CGA will investigate thoroughly and take all reasonable and appropriate action to resolve the issues before the property is handed over to the new tenant, in line with our Damp and Mould Policy and Procedure.

7.0 Letting the New Home

7.1 CGA will normally advertise a vacant home to prospective tenants once works commence to prepare the home for re-letting. CGA may advertise the property earlier, at the point it is about to become vacant, where a quick-let opportunity has been identified through the exit interview process. Full information about the property and local area will be provided as part of the advertisement.

7.2 When a prospective tenant has indicated their acceptance of a vacant home the tenancy will commence as soon as possible after all works have been completed and the property has passed quality checks. The tenancy will commence on the day the new tenant receives the keys for the property unless the tenant is transferring from another CGA home, in which case CGA will agree with the tenant the start date of the new tenancy based on their individual circumstances.

7.3 Tenants will be provided with an email link to the sign-up information on CGA's website, including what safety checks have been carried out and the standards their new home should meet. A printed version can be provided on request. Tenants who need help understanding this information will be offered support to ensure it is accessible.

7.4 Tenants will also receive copies of the property's gas and electrical certificates, Energy Performance Certificate, stop tap and utility meter locations, and an Asbestos Location Report detailing whether any asbestos-containing materials are present and if so, where. This information will be provided by email or in

print, and support will be available for any tenant who needs help understanding it.

7.5 CGA will contact the new tenant within 4-8 weeks of the tenancy start date to check that everything is satisfactory and to answer any questions they may have about their tenancy.

7.6 Where tenants raise any issues or concerns about their new home, either during the 4-8 week contact call or beforehand, CGA will respond promptly to investigate them and ensure the property meets the standards we have set.

8.0 Complaints

8.1 We recognise that sometimes our standards fall below those expected by both CGA and our tenants. In such instances, CGA welcomes complaints as an opportunity to continually improve the quality of its services.

8.2 Should a tenant wish to make a complaint about any of the services covered within this policy, they are encouraged to do so by using CGA's complaints process. Complaints can be made via telephone on 0800 953 0213 (option 6), via email at complaints@communitygateway.co.uk, in writing or in person to our Head Office or by completing the online form on our website.

8.3 A copy of our Complaints Policy can be found on our website or can be provided upon request.

9.0 Responsibilities

9.1 The CGA Board and Chief Executive will be responsible for the provision of adequate resources to enable full implementation of the Vacant Homes Policy.

9.2 The Head of PropertyCare is responsible for ensuring this Policy complies with all legislative requirements and for establishing effective management arrangements to achieve its objectives.

- 9.3 The Repairs Manager is responsible for overseeing the delivery of vacant homes works, ensuring they are completed efficiently and to the required standard.
- 9.4 The Void Surveyor is responsible for identifying the works needed on each vacant home.
- 9.5 The Works Supervisor is responsible for scheduling works and overseeing operative and contractor productivity to ensure works are completed on time and to the required standard.
- 9.6 The Tenancy Services Team is responsible for the allocation and letting of vacant homes to meet tenants' housing needs.
- 9.7 The Tenancy Support Team is responsible for managing the end of tenancy process, ensuring keys are returned on time, supporting tenants to leave their home safe, clean, and in good condition.

10. Monitoring and Review

- 10.1 This Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis, with a full review taking place every 3 years to ensure accuracy and that CGA complies with relevant legislation.
- 10.2 Internal oversight will be delivered through the monitoring of our operational KPIs and routine internal audits.

11. Data Protection

- 11.1 The tenancy provides the legal basis for processing of information aligned to this policy. The retention of information will be the length of the tenancy plus six years.

END

APPENDIX A

**APPENDIX B:
VACANT HOMES STANDARD**

AREA OF THE HOME	MINIMUM STANDARD
External (Property)	<p>Roof will be watertight</p> <p>Gutters and rainwater pipes will be functional and free of leaks*</p> <p>Drainage systems will be free flowing and functional</p> <p>Windows and doors will be secure and operational</p> <p>The property, including any outhouses/canopies will be structurally safe with pointing and rendering intact</p>
External (Garden)	<p>Paths will be firmly bedded and free of trip hazards</p> <p>External handrails and steps will be secure</p> <p>Existing fencing will be secure and free of any health and safety hazards. Missing or damaged fencing will be repaired or replaced as appropriate*</p> <p>Grass will be cut, and hedges trimmed*</p> <p>Surfaces will be free from graffiti*</p> <p>Refuse bin will be available and left empty*</p> <p>Gardens will be free of fly tipping and any large items of rubbish*</p>
Roof Space	<p>Will be clear of all items and debris</p> <p>Will have a minimum of 270mm of loft insulation in place (where relevant)</p>
Internal	<p>Internal doors will be intact, in good condition and operating correctly</p> <p>Skirting and architraves will be complete throughout, secure to the wall and in good condition</p> <p>Floors throughout will be free from major defects</p> <p>Nonslip flooring (where applicable) will be clean and in good condition</p> <p>Carpets and laminate will remain in situ unless otherwise agreed or necessary to be removed</p>
Bathroom	<p>Bathroom suite will be free from defects and in working order</p> <p>New toilet seat will be fitted or cleaned and sanitised</p> <p>An electric shower will be provided, and a new shower curtain fitted</p> <p>Tiles and splash backs will be fitted where appropriate and tiles in these areas will match</p> <p>Silicone to the shower area, bath, and basin will be free of mould growth</p> <p>An extractor fan will be installed to prevent moisture build-up</p>

Kitchen	<p>Kitchen units, worktop and flooring will be free from defects and in working order</p> <p>Wall tiles or upstands will be fitted where appropriate and tiles in these areas will match</p> <p>Units will be securely fitted and include space for washing machine, cooker, and fridge-freezer.</p> <p>There will be an electric or a gas cooker point</p>
Decoration	<p>There will be no sign of heavy nicotine damage</p> <p>All rooms will be ready for decoration</p> <p>Where required, walls and ceilings will be stripped of wallpaper, minor holes/cracks filled, rubbed down, and left in a condition that is ready for new tenants to apply their own decoration.</p> <p>Decoration voucher may be offered</p>
Cleaning	<p>The property will be free of any rubbish</p> <p>Floors will be swept and mopped, if appropriate</p> <p>All sanitary fittings will be cleaned</p> <p>Kitchen units and cupboards will be cleaned inside</p> <p>Internal window frames will be cleaned</p> <p>The property will be free of any visible signs of dampness and mould growth</p>
Home Safety	<p>All electrical fittings will be inspected and tested. Smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms will be in place</p> <p>The gas supply will have been temporarily disconnected and will require an appointment to re-connect. A gas safety check will be carried out at this appointment and will then take place every year.</p> <p>All open fires, solid fuel appliances, and log burners will be permanently decommissioned, with associated flues and chimneys made safe and sealed in accordance with current regulation.</p> <p>All non-standard items will be removed where they present a health and safety risk.</p> <p>Locks to external doors will be changed and 3 keys will be provided for each entrance to the property. 1 key or fob for any communal areas will be provided</p> <p>Safety information provided will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gas Servicing information Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) Asbestos information Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

	Fire Safety information (where applicable)
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*This work may need to be completed once tenancy has commenced

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