

Melton Borough Council Voids Policy January 2021

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Service Area	Housing & Communities		
Policy Owner	Housing Assets Manager		
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Table of Contents

1. Purpose and strategic context	2
2. Policy Scope	2
3. Legislation and Guidance	2
4. Principles	3
4.1 Mission Statement.....	3
4.2 Priorities	3
4.3 Policy Specifics	3
5. Melton Borough Council's Void Quality Standard (MVQS).....	5
6. Performance and Standards	5
7. Equality and Diversity	6
8. Complaints.....	6
9. Policy Review.....	6

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1. Purpose and strategic context

- 1.1 Melton Borough Council is committed to providing high quality homes for our tenants. The purpose of the Void Policy is to make void properties available for letting as quickly as possible, minimising rent loss and maximising the housing available, whilst enabling our tenants to know what they can expect from their home: that it will be clean, safe, secure, and comply with any legal requirements.
- 1.2 This Policy ensures consistency of the standard of properties that we let to our tenants; in doing so, it supports Priority One and Two of the Council's Corporate Plan:

Excellent services positively impacting on our communities

Providing high quality council homes and landlord services

- 1.3 The Policy will enable the Council's ambitions for its housing function in the following ways:
 - a) Ensure that all properties are available to our tenants at an acceptable standard, meeting the Council's legal obligations and the terms of the Tenancy Agreement.
 - b) Confirm the minimum standard our tenants can expect when they move into a property, ensuring consistency throughout the standard of every property we let.
 - c) Explain how the Council will maintain its housing stock and preserve its value.
 - d) Ensure that the Council lets its properties quickly and efficiently to ensure we meet housing demand and that we don't lose valuable rent.
 - e) Set out appropriate standards to measure performance delivery and ensure that no unnecessary expenditure is incurred in meeting these standards.

2. Policy Scope

- 2.1 This Policy applies to all properties held by the Council within its Housing Revenue Account and is triggered by a tenancy ending and it being appropriate for the Council to re-let the property.
- 2.2 Both mutual exchanges and direct lets for housing management reasons are outside the scope of the policy, although appropriate landlord compliance checks are carried out in relation to these functions.

3. Legislation and Guidance

- 3.1 This Policy will ensure compliance with current legislation, promote good practice and has regard to:
 - a) The Human Rights Act 1998
 - b) Equality Act 2010
 - c) Construction Design and Management Regulations (CDM 2015)
 - d) Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
 - e) The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
 - f) The Housing Act 2004
 - g) Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
 - h) Regulator for Social Housing: Homes Standard

- i) Any subsequent legislation in force at the time

4. Principles

4.1 Mission Statement

To meet the purposes of the Policy, the Council adopts this Void Mission Statement:

Minimise loss to the Council through the efficient letting of homes at the right time to the required standard

This statement can be expanded as follows:

- a) Minimise loss – this includes: rent loss; Council Tax charges; avoiding expensive nightly paid accommodation due to lack of temporary accommodation; avoiding refusals; and avoiding tenancies starting with a poor experience that leads to failure
- b) Efficient letting – taking into account: void turnaround times; void expenditure; balancing major works against doing the minimum required; avoiding refusals
- c) Right time – working to consistent timescales and delivering to the targets given
- d) Required standard – meeting or exceeding the basic re-let standard, including cleanliness, and meeting all landlord statutory requirements (including: gas; electric; and water safety).

4.2 Priorities

Accordingly, this gives a number of key priorities:

- a) Provide a safe and secure home;
- b) Ensure that our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard;
- c) Improve re-let timescales;
- d) Provide a re-let standard that meets customers' expectations;
- e) Capture excellent data on the property and its major components; and
- f) Maximise the use of IT.

4.3 Policy Specifics

- 4.3.1 We continue to invest in our properties so that the Decent Homes Standard is maintained. We do this through annual improvement and maintenance programmes and by having a minimum standard for the properties we re-let once they become void.
- 4.3.2 A recharge will be raised for removal of goods and clearance of gardens to recoup expenditure and repairs where the tenancy agreement has been breached.
- 4.3.3 Where non-standard tenant improvements are in place and meet statutory and regulatory requirements, the re-let will be done with the following confirmed to the new tenant in writing:
 - i. The improvement is gifted to the incoming tenant
 - ii. The Council does not accept any responsibility for the maintenance of the improvement
 - iii. If the improvement is not maintained to a reasonable standard by tenant and/or it reaches the end of its lifespan, the Council will remove it and undertake remedial works to restore the property to the Council's

standard, and that this will be at no cost to the incoming tenant, save any redecoration

- iv. If white goods are in good condition we will PAT test and gift to new tenants.

If the incoming tenant refuses the improvement, it will be removed and remedial works will be done to the Council's standard where appropriate.

- 4.3.4 Properties coming back with history of damp and mould issues will have improvements made to the heating system. Where possible storage heaters will be replaced by gas central heating, following the below requirements:
- a) Existing or cost effective gas supply can be arranged.
 - b) Assuring ventilation is adequate

- 4.3.5 Where there is no gas mains supply, the Council will undertake an options appraisal considering:
- a) New efficient storage heaters; or
 - b) Alternative methods including ground and air source heat pumps.

This will be a best value approach based on but not limited to cost, ease of installation, the thermal characteristics of the property, and likely heating costs for future tenants.

- 4.3.6 Existing disabled adaptations will be left in place, subject to testing to establish they remain safe and appropriate for the property type. The property will be matched to an applicant with an appropriate long-term housing need.

Medical aids or equipment, e.g. walking frames, shower chairs etc. left in properties without a clear indication of ownership (provider labels etc.) will be deemed to be tenant belongings that have been abandoned and will be disposed of in line with the Council's usual approach.

- 4.3.7 Any arrangements between the outgoing tenant(s) in relation to the sale or disposal of their goods is a matter between third parties that the Council has no interest in. It must be concluded prior to the Council taking possession as access to the property will not be possible from that point.

- 4.3.8 The Council will restrict access to lofts in properties, going through the void process.

- 4.3.9 Sheltered housing and properties used for Temporary Accommodation are to be fully decorated.

- 4.3.10 The Council will continue to aim to minimise the time a property is unoccupied by carrying out inspections in the tenant's notice period wherever possible.

- 4.3.11 During void works, the property is effectively a building site. Applicants who have been offered the property will only be able to undertake a viewing by prior appointment, accompanied by a Council Officer, and subject to appropriate risk assessments.

- 4.3.11 To assist with re-let times the Council may:
- a) Offer an incentive to tenants to leave their home in lettable condition
 - b) Complete non-urgent repairs once the new tenant has moved in. If this is the case, tenants will be informed of the timescale for their completion.

- c) Leave work to the garden if this means the property can be let to a new tenant faster. The gardening work will be completed once the property is occupied.
- d) Fully consult with the incoming tenant in relation to any major works needed at the new property, for example, a new kitchen.

5. Melton Borough Council's Void Quality Standard (MVQS)

- 5.1 This Policy confirms the following Policy approach to re-let standards:
- a) Carry out a gas safety check where gas is installed and leave a copy of the certificate at the property.
 - b) Carry out a safety check of the electrical installation.
 - c) Undertake a water hygiene test and provide a certificate.
 - d) Remove any rubbish from the property and garden.
 - e) Clean the property.
 - f) Re-decorate some or all of the property if it is required, or provide a decoration voucher to assist with the cost.
 - g) Carry out all of the urgent repairs and try and complete all other repairs whilst the property is empty.
 - h) Keep the incoming tenant informed of the date the property will be ready.
- 5.2 The full re-let standard is covered by the Melton Void Quality Standard (Appendix One).

6. Performance and Standards

- 6.1 The overall aim is to be within the national top quartile for void performance. Performance will be monitored regularly to help drive up management standards, ensure value for money by reducing costs, improving efficiency and satisfaction levels.
- 6.2 The Council acknowledges its stock requires considerable capital investment to improve it to the Decent Homes Standard and has committed to doing so. However, this does mean properties needing re-let works are often identified as requiring capital works. To reflect this, void performance will be managed operationally by reporting monthly using the following categories:

Void type	Definition
Type 1	Minimal works with quicker turnaround for relet
Type 2	More complex repairs required including addressing the Decent Homes Standard, improvement works
Type 3	Properties requiring reconfiguration, significant works and / or unsuitable to let, or held vacant for decant and/or regeneration/refurbishment projects
Type 4	Ready to let

- 6.3 Overall, void turnaround times are reported as part of the suite of Corporate Performance Indicators. Void budgets are managed through the usual Corporate budget monitoring processes.
- 6.4 In addition to the above, all void properties will be post-inspected upon completion of any identified works required prior to the new tenant viewing the property to ensure it meets the MVQS and any identified repairs required after re-let will be checked by our Housing Asset Management Team.

- 6.5 The Council will also capture new tenant feedback and use this to inform process and policy improvements in relation to the re-let standard, allocations process, and tenancy sign-up.

7. Equality and Diversity

- 7.1 Melton Borough Council will ensure its procedures are non-discriminatory and will promote equal opportunity by preventing and eliminating discrimination on the grounds of equality, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, belief, culture, age or other protected characteristic. We will ensure our services are accessible, responsive and sensitive to the diverse needs of individuals.
- 7.2 To support the needs of customers whose first language is not English, the Council will provide translation and interpretation services when needed. The Council will ensure that information is accessible and available in other formats such as large print, tape and Braille, as needed.

8. Complaints

- 8.1 Should there be a complaint from the outgoing tenant or the new tenant concerning any aspect of the void works, this will be dealt with via the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

9. Policy Review

- 9.1 The Policy will be reviewed every four years or if required by changes to statute or regulation.