



ABANDONED PROPERTIES POLICY

Type of Document:	Policy Statement
Date:	September 2025

1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out a clear and consistent approach for managing Abandoned properties at Unity HA and to minimise the risks from abandoned properties by Unity HA's tenants.
- 1.2 This policy relates to all tenancies granted by Unity Housing Association.
- 1.3 This policy is to be read alongside Unity HA's Abandonment Procedure.

2. Legal & regulatory framework

- 2.1 The following legislation and standards apply to this policy:

- **Protection from Eviction Act 1977 Part 1 (1) (2)**

This Act sets out the right of a tenant to occupy a property and ensures anyone preventing them from doing so is guilty of an offence under this Act. The exception to this is if it can be reasonably believed that the tenant is no longer living at the property.

- **Housing Act 1988 section 15A: Loss of Assured Tenancy Status**

Under this Act an assured tenancy loses its assured status if the tenant sub-lets the whole of the dwelling-house (or sub-lets first part of it and then the remainder).

- **Notices to Quit etc. (Prescribed Information) Regulations 1988**

Notices served to end a tenancy must be in writing, give four weeks' notice, and contain the prescribed information.

- **Torts (Interference with Goods) Act 1977**

This Act prescribes that the bailee (ie Unity HA, when in possession of a former tenant's belongings following abandonment of a property) must serve reasonable notice on the bailor (i.e. former resident) of intention to sell or dispose of their belongings.

- **Regulator of Social Housing Tenancy Standard**

3. Definition of Abandonment

3.1 A property is considered abandoned if:

- The tenant(s) has vacated the property without prior notification or valid reason, and to which the tenant(s) do not intend to return.
- There are clear signs of abandonment, such as uncollected mail, overgrown gardens, or reports from neighbours.
- If the customer is incarcerated for a duration suggesting no intention or ability to return to the property.
- Where a customer has been taken into a Hospital/Mental Health facility, with no intention to return to the property. Where appropriate we will make any necessary referrals through to Adult Safeguarding Teams.
- Unity HA will ensure compliance with the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and will not take possession unless Abandonment is reasonably evident and documented.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 It is the policy of Unity HA to proactively identify and address abandoned properties within our social housing portfolio.

4.2 We are committed to:

- Conducting thorough investigations to confirm abandonment or temporary absence
- Securing and recovering possession of Abandoned properties in a timely manner.
- Ensuring properties are quickly re-allocated to eligible individuals or families on the housing waiting list.
- Providing support to tenants at risk of abandonment due to financial or personal difficulties.
- Reviewing abandonment case data periodically to understand underlying trends and risks, and to inform strategies for targeted interventions.

5. Policy aims and objectives

5.1 This policy aims to:

- Ensure that suspected abandonments are investigated and managed thoroughly
- Set out the circumstances for when Unity HA will seek to recover possession of our properties where we believe they are abandoned
- Prevent Unity HA properties from falling into disrepair and maintain gas/electrical safety compliance by ensuring they are occupied
- Minimise void and rent loss
- Make the best use of our available homes

6. Policy Detail

6.1 Preventing abandoned properties

6.1.1 Unity HA recognise that abandoned properties are a form of tenancy failure.

6.1.2 As such we will ensure tenants at high risk of abandonment are offered or signposted to tailored support, working in partnership with internal colleagues and external stakeholders.

6.1.3 Unity HA will review abandonment and other related data to understand which groups of tenants are more vulnerable to abandonments.

6.2 Investigating abandoned properties

6.2.1 Where there is suspicion of abandonment of a property we will undertake all necessary checks to establish if the tenant(s) are living there. This may include (but not limited to):

- Repeat visits to the property to inspect and record external and internal condition of the property including taking photographic evidence
- Checking of utility meters for usage as evidence of occupation
- Contacting neighbours, family members and next of kin and any other known associates of the tenant(s)
- Contacting external agencies and/or partners. This includes statutory agencies, other landlords and utility companies
- Interrogating the housing register for evidence of alternative addresses
- Continue to contact the customer by all available means throughout the process

6.2.2 Where a suspected abandoned property is deemed as insecure we will take measures to secure the property immediately. Unity HA reserves the right to recharge any costs associated with securing the property back to the tenant(s).

6.2.3 We will serve the appropriate Notice(s) immediately to start the process of recovering the property. Unity HA will retain evidence of reasonable efforts to contact former tenants before disposal of goods, including logs of notices served.

6.2.4 Where contact is made with the tenant(s) and they confirm they do not intend to return to the property we will pursue formal termination or surrender of the tenancy. The tenant(s) will be expected to clear the property of their belongings and advised that any failure to do so will result in the items being disposed of.

6.3 Recovering possession

6.3.1 Where investigations lead to the conclusion that the property has been abandoned, Unity HA will take steps to repossess the property upon expiry of the Notice. The tenancy will be deemed to have ended based on an implied surrender. The decision to take possession must be made by the Housing Services Manager, or in their absence, any other manager operating at the same or higher level.

6.3.2 Any items left in the property following repossession will be logged on an inventory and photographs taken.

6.3.3 A Tort Notice will be served providing notice of storage and arrangements to collect the items.

6.3.4 Items will be stored for 28 days after which they will be sold or disposed of. Any costs associated with the storage and disposal may be recharged to the former tenant(s).

Where there are circumstances, where the customer is unable to collect belongings due to being in prison, death of a customer long term care with no capacity then we may serve a 14 day Torte notice.

6.3.3 Items that are damaged or soiled and other perishable items will be disposed of immediately upon possession. Photographic evidence will be kept of any disposed items.

6.3.4 Any monetary value from the sale of the items will be offset against removal and storage costs, and any other debts owed to Unity HA. Any surplus amounts after the off-setting of debts will be paid to the former tenant(s) where possible and economically viable to do so

6.3.4 Where a tenant(s) feels their tenancy has been terminated unjustly, they should lodge a complaint through Unity HA's complaints policy.

6.4 Other considerations

6.4.1 Where Unity HA find there is someone other than the tenant(s) living in the property, Unity will take all necessary action to evict them and take back vacant possession of the property.

6.4.2 In very exceptional circumstances Unity HA may consider making a management let to the person(s) residing in the property. Decisions to make a management let must be made by the Housing Services Manager, or, in their absence, any other manager operating at the same or higher level. This decision will be documented to demonstrate transparency and compliance with our Allocations policy.

6.4.3 Where a customer surrenders their tenancy by returning the keys without a valid termination notice, Unity HA will serve a Notice to Quit to formally end the tenancy. Unity HA may, at its discretion, agree to end the tenancy with immediate effect without giving notice. The decision to do this must be taken by the Housing Services Manager, or, in their absence, any other manager operating at the same or higher level.

6.4.4 Where a tenant(s) make contact after the expiry of the Notice to Quit ie when the tenancy has lawfully ended, Unity HA is not obliged to grant a new tenancy to them. Any decision to do so will be made on an individual basis and be dependant on the particular circumstances and made by the Housing Services Manager or, in their absence, any other manager operating at the same or higher level.

6.4.5 In such circumstances the former tenant(s) will be provided with appropriate support and information to find suitable alternative accommodation.

7. Responsibilities, monitoring and performance

7.1 Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation rests with the Housing Services Manager, who will also ensure that staff receive the appropriate training and support to act in accordance with this policy.

7.2 All staff have adequate training on Abandonments and this will be reviewed on a case by case basis and via our Solicitors for legal compliance.

8. Associated policies and documents

8.1 This policy should be read and applied in conjunction with the following:

- Lettings Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Unity HA tenancy agreements

9. Equality and Diversity Statement

9.1 Unity HA are committed to treating people fairly, and without bias and discrimination. We promote equal opportunities to all our customers and stakeholders regardless of race, religious or non-religious belief, gender, age, ethnic origin, disability, marital status or sexual orientation.

9.2 We also recognise that we have a diverse customer base and will therefore make reasonable adjustments to ensure residents understand this policy, and in any contact we have with residents in the course of liaising with them about their tenancy.

9.3 We will continue to monitor and analyse our abandonment data to understand the impact of abandonments and tenancy failure within different groups. These are also reported to the Board members on an annual basis.

- 9.4 All staff receive Equality and Diversity training at Unity HA and are responsible for ensuring that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy is incorporated into all aspects of their work.

10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

- 10.1 Unity HA have a clear policy on data protection and sharing data with other partners/third parties under the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and other associated legislation. This is clearly set out in our Data Protection Policy which, along with its associated procedures, must be followed throughout the operation of this policy.

Any photos, logs and communications will be stored securely and in line with data protection regulations.

11. Review

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or earlier if required to do so by any legislative or regulatory changes, or through best practice or operational changes.
- 11.2 Before any repossession an internal review or peer check will be required to make sure the process has been followed correctly, fairly and is proportionate.

Document management

Consultation and assessment	
Customer consultation	Policy previously approved by the Residents Panel. Further consultation not required for minor changes to content.
Equality Impact Assessment	EIA completed for this review. No negative impact identified.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required. Minimal risk of data breaches. Information sharing agreements in place with key community safety partners and Leeds City Council.

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Document review history			
Version	Date amended	Date approved	Key changes
1.0	December 2024		Original document
2.0	September 2025	October 2025	Review