



Moving in... moving out

A guide for people who have been offered a tenancy, or are moving in to, or are leaving a council tenancy.

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The **Voids Management Policy** describes the way East Lothian Council deal with empty council houses, which we call 'voids'.

The Policy does not cover how we decide who moves in to a council house. Our Allocations Policy deals with this.

If you would like a copy of the Voids Management Policy, please contact your Local Housing Office on **01620 827827**, or at one of the locations listed on the below.

Musselburgh Area

Brunton Hall, Ladywell Way
Musselburgh.
housingmusselburgh@
eastlothian.gov.uk

Prestonpans Area

Aldhammer House
Prestonpans.
housingprestonpans@
eastlothian.gov.uk

Tranent Area

The George Johnstone Centre
35 Winton Place, Tranent.
housingtranent@
eastlothian.gov.uk

East Area – Haddington Office

John Muir House, Haddington.
housinghaddington@
eastlothian.gov.uk

East Area – North Berwick Office

School Road, North Berwick.
housingnorthberwick@
eastlothian.gov.uk

East Area – Dunbar Office

Bleachingfield Centre
Countess Crescent, Dunbar.
housingdunbar@
eastlothian.gov.uk

We want you to know what you can expect from us, and what your responsibilities are, when leaving or moving in to a council house.

It gives our staff clear guidance in the way they should carry out their jobs when dealing with “voids” and will improve the services that we provide to you.

We want to make sure that both you and our staff understand the law that applies in this area.

We also want to make sure that we are always improving the way we deal with empty houses, and the service we give.

How did we develop the Voids Policy?

The Policy was developed by people who have an interest or experience in how we deal with empty houses. The group included tenants representatives, Council staff and local Councillors. They had to make sure that our Voids Management Policy gives you a high standard of service and complies with the law.

What did we consider?

The Council must try to achieve “best value” in all areas of our services. Empty houses do not provide any rental income. Rental income pays for the service that we provide to you, including house repairs and improvements. People waiting for housing also feel frustrated when they see empty council houses. So we must try to get empty houses ready to re-let again as soon we can. But while houses are empty, we also have the chance to carry out repairs and improvements. So we must strike a balance between maintaining the house and making it available to let.

We also have to comply with law, for example, about:

- the minimum standard which all houses must meet
- incoming and outgoing tenant's rights
- the health and safety of customers and employees.

We also to try to meet the needs of all our customers, and make sure that we treat everyone equally regardless of their age, disability, gender, race, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.

When we make an offer

We will match empty houses to applicants as soon as we can. For more information, see our Allocations Policy.

We will deliver all offers to applicants currently living in East Lothian by hand. We will send offers to applicants living outside East Lothian by Royal Mail Special Delivery. Our Lettings Commitment is a summary of the property standards that you can expect of your new home. It is included in this guide, which will be sent with the offer letter.

We will also send a local information sheet to help you to decide if the property on offer is suitable for you. The sheet contains details of local tenants groups, doctors, schools, libraries and transport information.

After receiving an offer, you have three working days to respond. If you do not reply within three working days, we will consider the offer as having been refused.

Viewing Properties

If you tell us that you are interested in the property that we have offered you, we will arrange for you to view it. A Housing Officer will accompany you, and the viewing will take place at a time suitable to you. You must then accept or refuse the offer within two working days of the viewing.

Specimen Tenancy Agreement

If you accept an offer of tenancy, we will send you a specimen copy of your Tenancy Agreement. This will be either an East Lothian Scottish Secure Tenancy or a Scottish Short Secure Tenancy.

Sign-up

If you accept an offer, you will need to attend a “sign-up” meeting with a Housing Officer. At this meeting, we will explain your rights and responsibilities as a tenant, and find out about any particular needs that you have. Both you and the council officer will then sign the Tenancy Agreement.

Handover of Keys

We will hand the keys for the property to you at the property. This will allow you to check that we have met our standards, and will also ensure that we agree on the gas and electrical meter readings.

Kitchen & Bathroom Upgrades

East Lothian Council are committed to ensuring that, by 2015, all mainstream Council housing will have kitchens, bathrooms and electrical wiring systems which at least meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. We currently programme such upgrades one year in advance. We will inform tenants by letter at least six months prior to the proposed work taking place.

Post-Occupancy Repairs

Some repairs will not be done until after you move in. You will have to arrange appointments with us to arrange these repairs. Please contact our Contact Centre to arrange these repairs. The Contact Centre number is **0845 602 2223**.

Settling-in Visit

A Housing Officer will visit you between 6 to 8 weeks after you move in. He or she will make sure that you have settled-in to your new home, and resolve any problems that you may have.

What you can expect of your new home

Before you move in, we will ensure that:

- The house is structurally stable, wind & watertight and free from dampness
- All electrical circuits, sockets and fittings are safe
- The gas supply is safe and that all gas fittings have been checked for safety
- Your kitchen & bathroom are clean and fully operational
- All rooms are cleaned to a set standard
- All floor coverings will be removed, and floor surfaces are clean and safe
- All walls, ceilings and skirtings are sound and free from major holes
- The heating system is in working order, and you are given instructions of use
- All windows will be fully operational and clean inside and out
- New locks are fitted to external doors, and you are given two sets of keys
- All graffiti is removed

Some things may not be done until after you move in, such as:

- All other repairs not covered above, for which we are responsible
- A one-off tidy of your garden
- Plaster repairs, where you will be removing wallpaper

You will be responsible for:

- The internal decoration of the house, including the removal of wallpaper

End of Tenancy Notice

When leaving a Council tenancy, normally you must give us at least 28 days notice. You can give us shorter notice if you are moving to another Council or Housing Association tenancy.

Returning Keys

You must return your keys by 10am on the agreed end date. If you return the keys late, the tenancy will continue until you hand them in and we will charge rent for each extra day that you keep them.

End of Tenancy Visits

Where possible, we will visit you to answer any questions you may have about ending your tenancy and remind you of your responsibilities. You will find these in the End of Tenancy Checklist.

End of Tenancy Checklist

On leaving your property, you must make sure that you meet all your responsibilities. These are detailed on the checklist on page 10 of this booklet.

Recharges

If you do not meet your responsibilities, we will arrange for any work to be done for you. You will then have to pay for this work.

Compensation for Improvements

You can claim money back for some improvements you have carried out during your tenancy. We will remind you of this, and explain the conditions for making a claim.

On leaving your home, you should ensure that:

Cleaning

- All rooms are cleared and left in a clean and hygienic condition
- All windows are left clean inside and out
- The loft is cleared of all items

Decoration

- The house is left in good decorative order

Fixtures and fittings

- Fixtures and fittings which were installed without permission are removed
- Missing fixtures and fittings are replaced
- Damaged fixtures are replaced

Floors

- All floor coverings are removed
- External areas
- Gardens and outbuildings are left tidy and cleared of all items

Keys

- All keys, including door entry keys and key fobs, are returned by 10am on the end date

Meters

- All debt is cleared on gas or electric prepayment meters
 - All keys or payment cards for the meters are left in the property
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Should any of these responsibilities not be met, the Council will arrange for the work to be done on your behalf. Any such work will be recharged to you.

You can arrange for any large items to be uplifted by contacting our **Special Uplift Service** on 01875 824305. Please note that such items must be presented on the kerbside by 7am on the day of the collection.

Making a difference **together**

www.eastlothian.gov.uk



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone the Public Information Officer on 01620 827199