

Leicester City Council

Private Sector Empty Homes Standard

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Section 1

Empty Homes Strategy (EHS) – Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard - a summary of the definition:

1.1 A property that meets the Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard is one, which is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities. It is in good decorative order with a secure property boundary and properly maintained grounds.

1.2 The home must meet the following **seven** criteria to achieve Leicester City Council's Private Sector Empty Homes Standard

a) It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing (see section 2.2).
Homes which fail to meet this criterion are those containing one or more hazards assessed as serious (Category 1), under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

b) It is in a reasonable state of repair (see section 2.3).

Homes which fail to meet this criterion are those where either:

- one or more of the key building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair; or
- two or more of the other building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair.

c) It has reasonably modern facilities and services (see section 2.4)

Homes which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack all or any of the following:

- a reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less);
- a kitchen with adequate space and layout;
- a reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less);
- an appropriately located bathroom and WC;
- adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem);
- adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (see section 2.5).

This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating.

e) It is in a reasonable state of decorative order (see section 2.6).

Homes which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack the following:

- Internal decoration that is clean and sound
- External decoration that is clean, protective, durable and sound.

f) It has properly maintained grounds and external boundaries (see sections 2.7.1 & 2.7.2).

Homes which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack the following:

- Grounds which are free from hazards, pests, overgrowth, and rubbish
- Property Boundaries which are continuous, secure and in a safe condition

g) Exceptions (see section 2.8):

In some areas environmental and security works may be required to meet Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard if they are considered to be a high priority.

Section 2

What is a Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard? - the detailed definition

2.1: This section gives detailed definitions of each of the seven criteria that make up the Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard.

Criterion a: It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing

1.0 The current minimum standard for housing is determined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), set out in the Housing Act 2004. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued updated operating guidance on inspections and hazards, under Section 9 of the act, in February 2006.

The 'Housing Health and Safety Rating System, Operating Guidance' can be downloaded free of charge from the DCLG website. This guidance, updated in June 2006, replaced 'A Decent Home: The definition and guidance for implementation' published in February 2004.

Copies of this publication and alternative formats are available from:

DCLG Publications
P.O. Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire LS23 7NB

Tel: 0870 1226 236
Fax: 0870 1226 237
Email: communities@twoten.com

or enter <http://www.communities.gov.uk/> and type HHSRS in the search panel.

Criterion b: It is in a reasonable state of repair

2.0 Homes where one or more key building components are old and require replacing or major repair.

Definition of key Building components

Building components are the structural parts of a dwelling (e.g. wall structure, roof structure), other external elements (e.g. roof covering, chimneys) and internal services and amenities (e.g. kitchens, heating systems). Key building components are those which if in poor condition, could have an immediate impact on the integrity of the building and cause further deterioration in other components. They are the external components plus internal components that have potential safety implications and include:

- external walls;

- roof structure and covering;
- windows/doors
- chimneys
- central heating boilers
- gas fires
- storage heaters and
- electrics

If any of these components are old and need replacing, or require immediate major repair, then the dwelling is not in a reasonable state of repair and remedial action is required.

Other building components are those that have a less immediate impact on the integrity of the dwelling. Their combined effect is therefore considered, with a dwelling not in a reasonable state of repair if two or more are old and need replacing or require immediate major repair.

Criterion c: It has reasonably modern facilities and services
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2.4 A home is considered not to meet this criterion if it lacks all or any of the following facilities:

- a kitchen which is 20 years old or less
- a kitchen with adequate space and layout
- a bathroom which is 30 years old or less
- an appropriately located bathroom and WC
- adequate noise insulation and
- adequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats
- a kitchen failing on adequate space and layout would be one that was too small to contain all the required items (sink, cupboards cooker space, worktops etc) appropriate to the size of the dwelling
- an inappropriately located bathroom and WC is one where the main bathroom or WC is located in a bedroom or accessed through a bedroom (unless the bedroom is not used or the dwelling is for a single person). A dwelling would also fail if the main WC is external or located on a different floor to the nearest wash hand basin, or if a WC without a wash hand basin opens on to a kitchen in an inappropriate area, for example next to the food preparation area
- inadequate insulation from external airborne noise would be where there are problems with, for example, traffic (rail, road and aeroplanes) or factory noise. Owners should ensure reasonable insulation from these problems through installation of appropriate acoustic glazing in line with the current Building Regulations and

- inadequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats would be one with insufficient room to manoeuvre easily for example where there are narrow access ways with awkward corners and turnings, steep staircases, inadequate landings, absence of handrails, low headroom etc.

Criterion d: It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort
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2.5 The revised definition requires a dwelling to have both:

- efficient heating and
- effective insulation.

2.5.1 Efficient heating is defined as any gas or oil programmable central heating or electric storage heaters or programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating or similarly efficient heating systems which are developed in the future.¹ Heating sources which provide less energy efficient options fail the Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard. Programmable heating is where the timing and the temperature of the heating can be controlled by the occupants.

Where new heating systems are being installed or existing system replaced, owners should take the opportunity to increase the energy efficiency of the dwelling if possible. This would be achieved through installing energy efficient boilers where possible. Energy efficient boilers are those that comply with Building Regulations.

2.5.2: Effective insulation can be defined, as loft insulation with a minimum thickness of 200mm.

If new heating or insulation is being installed, it is important that steps are taken to ensure the dwelling is adequately ventilated.

Criterion e: It is in reasonable state of decorative order

2.6 Internal woodwork painted to a gloss finish, which is clean and even.

Internal walls and ceilings to be clean even sound and free from mould and staining.

External woodwork to be painted to a gloss finish which is continuous, sound, durable and protective.

Criterion f: It has properly maintained grounds and external boundaries
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2.7.1 Homes to have fences, hedges or walls which are properly maintained and are continuous, safe and secure.

2.7.2 Grounds to be maintained and free from hazards, overgrown weeds, shrubs, vermin and rubbish. Hard surfaces, including paths to be even and free from deterioration.

Criterion g: Exceptions

¹ For example efficient heating based on renewable sources.

2.8 Environmental and security works may be required to meet Leicester Private Sector Empty Homes Standard if considered a high priority in some areas. This may include security gates to shared yards and secure fencing to prevent anti-social behaviour problems.