

REPAIRS & VOIDS RECHARGE POLICY

Doc. Ref:	BTS PL 005
Issue:	3
Amended:	1/09/2022
Page:	1 of 6

Plymouth Community Homes



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Doc. Ref:	BTS PL 005
Issue:	3
Amended:	1/09/2022
Page:	2 of 6

REPAIRS AND VOIDS RECHARGE POLICY

Purpose

The objectives of the repairs and voids recharge policy are:-

- To recover the cost of rechargeable repairs from current and former tenants.
- To maximise income by the recovery of debts owed relating to rechargeable repairs and thus demonstrate value for money within the repairs service.
- To promote an equitable service by ensuring that tenants who incur charges are held responsible.

Policy

Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) is committed to providing a cost effective, efficient repairs and maintenance service whilst meeting all its legal and contractual obligations as a Registered Social Landlord.

PCH is aware that there are a significant number of day-to-day and void repairs that are clearly the responsibility of the tenant and as such should be recharged to the current or former tenant.

The aim of the policy is to promote a responsible attitude by tenants towards their property by ensuring that costs are pursued from those who are negligent or deliberately cause damage.

Definition of rechargeable repairs

Rechargeable repairs are defined as repairs that are caused by damage to fixtures and fittings internally or externally by a tenant, a member of the tenant's household or any visitor to the tenant's property that cannot be attributed to normal wear and tear through the duration of their tenancy. This includes where a tenant does not hand back a full set of keys when they vacate a property and locks have to therefore be changed to make it secure for the incoming tenant.

Implementation

The Tenancy Agreement states that PCH can and will recharge tenants and former tenants for damage to a property resulting from misuse or neglect by tenants, members of the tenants' family or visitors to their property.

It may be possible in certain circumstances for the customer to claim under their house contents insurance e.g. for accidental damage to sanitary ware, and new tenants should be encouraged to take up such a policy.

PCH will seek reimbursement from all tenants and former tenants who are considered to be responsible for the damage/neglect. This includes tenants who abandon their property but are later traced.

There are a number of ways that rechargeable repairs can be identified by PCH:

- Repairs requests received by the call centre
- During a repair pre-inspection by an employee
- During a pre-transfer, mutual exchange or void inspection
- During a visit to the property by any other employee of PCH

REPAIRS & VOIDS RECHARGE POLICY

Doc. Ref:	BTS PL 005
Issue:	3
Amended:	1/09/2022
Page:	3 of 6

Rechargeable repairs categories

- Tenants' obligations – under the terms and conditions of the Tenancy Agreement, the tenant is responsible for certain types of repair. If the tenant fails to carry or have carried out one of these repairs, a recharge will apply, although the customer should first be given the opportunity to rectify the situation.
- Deliberate damage or damage due to neglect by current tenants – where damage has occurred as a result of deliberate abuse or wilful negligence by the tenant, their family or visitors, the necessary repair work will be rechargeable. If the tenant wishes to undertake the remedial work themselves, they will be given 28 calendar days to do so.

PCH will inspect any work carried out by the tenant to ensure it complies with our current standards. Where it fails to meet our current guidelines, PCH reserves the right to recharge for any remedial work required.

- Unauthorised alterations by current tenants – under Section 97 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended), tenants must seek the landlord's consent before undertaking any alterations to the property. PCH may attach reasonable conditions before granting permission. Where tenants have carried out unauthorised repairs, unless there is an immediate health and safety risk, they should be given 28 calendar days to rectify the faults or reinstate to its original condition.

A tenant can apply for retrospective authorisation which will normally be granted provided the work is of a sufficient standard, complies with any regulatory requirements and has been carried out by a competent tradesperson.

Where permission has not been granted for alterations, PCH reserves the right to make good the work, or reinstate the property to its previous condition and recharge the tenant accordingly.

- Void properties, transfers and mutual exchanges – where unauthorised alterations or damage is identified during the void inspection process, the tenant will be advised of the cost of reinstatement and charged accordingly.

In the case of transfers and mutual exchanges, the tenant should be given the opportunity to rectify the faults or pay the costs of the remedial works. The transfer or mutual exchange will not be granted until either the work has been completed satisfactorily by the tenant or the costs have been paid. PCH has the right to withdraw the transfer offer at the inspection stage if it is felt that waiting for the faults to be rectified will delay the letting of the new property

Tenants wishing to transfer to another property or former tenants wishing to be re-housed will be prevented from doing so until they have cleared their debt.

REPAIRS & VOIDS RECHARGE POLICY

Doc. Ref:	BTS PL 005
Issue:	3
Amended:	1/09/2022
Page:	4 of 6

When a property is vacated, the outgoing tenant is required to hand back all of their keys. While the barrels on front door Yale-type locks are routinely renewed between tenancies as part of the void works, other locks (such as for the back door or an outhouse) are not unless no keys have been handed back by the outgoing tenant. In such a situation, the locks will be changed and the cost of this recharged to the outgoing tenant.

- Accidental damage – where accidental damage has occurred to fixtures and fittings, PCH will take into account the damage caused versus the lifespan of the product before reaching a decision whether to recharge.
- Damage caused by the Police following a lawful raid at the property – where an arrest is made, the cost of making good any damage (e.g. repair or replacement of external doors) will be recharged to the tenant.

Where no arrest is made, the repairs team will liaise with the local Police for reimbursement of costs.

- Misuse of the repairs service – where customers misuse the out of hours service, the customer will be recharged the call-out fee.
- Cost of removing rubbish and clearing untidy gardens – if a tenant is guilty of dumping rubbish in their garden or their garden needs clearing, their Housing Officer should in the first instance contact the tenant to rectify the situation. There is a clear procedure for dealing with these issues, but if the tenant fails to undertake the necessary work the Housing Officer can arrange for the garden and/or rubbish to be cleared and recharge the tenant.

When a tenancy is terminated, the property should be left in a clean, tidy and empty condition and the garden should not be overgrown. PCH reserves the right to recharge the outgoing tenant the cost of clearing any furniture or goods left in the property, including the loft and any sheds/outhouses, and for clearing the garden of any rubbish, cutting the grass or hedges or any other landscaping works required to bring them back to a satisfactory level.

REPAIRS & VOIDS RECHARGE POLICY

Doc. Ref:	BTS PL 005
Issue:	3
Amended:	1/09/2022
Page:	5 of 6

Vulnerable tenants

Where there are concerns about the health and vulnerability of the tenant in question, these may be taken into consideration when assessing whether and how much to recharge current or former tenants.

If the call handler, Housing Officer or repairs operative is unsure at any time as to whether a recharge should be made because of issues such as domestic abuse, vulnerabilities including mental health issues or where the tenant is elderly, the matter should be referred in the first instance to their line manager. In cases of Domestic Abuse, we won't charge where there is damage caused by the perpetrator/abuser or where works are required to make the victim safe.

If there is likelihood that the repair will affect a tenant's medical condition or general well-being, the repair should not necessarily be delayed until a decision about whether the tenant will or will not be recharged has been taken, or pending the agreement of a repayment plan. The tenant will be informed when a decision has been made.

Where there are mitigating circumstances, the decision on how to recharge vulnerable tenants will be at the discretion of the Team Leader Repairs after consultation with the relevant Housing Officer or Sheltered Housing Officer.

Assessment of rechargeable repairs

All requests for repairs that are considered to be rechargeable will be pre-inspected by a repairs supervisor (unless it is an emergency or urgent) and photographs taken where necessary. If the repair is confirmed as being rechargeable, the tenant will be advised accordingly and wherever possible will be required to sign a form acknowledging their responsibility for payment.

Repayment Arrangements

Upon completion of the repair, the tenant will be invoiced for the full cost. In most cases, the tenant will be advised that they should immediately pay this in full. However, in some exceptional cases they may be unable to do this, and they will be asked to agree a reasonable repayment plan for the outstanding sum. This will be agreed with the income recovery team.

Payment will be pursued in accordance with PCH's Financial Regulations and arrears procedures.

Complaints

All customer complaints in relation to the raising and pursuance of rechargeable repairs will be dealt with in the first instance by the relevant manager. Due to the nature of the policy and the various departments which the policy covers, the following will apply: -

- Void property recharges – referral to the Voids Manager
- Rechargeable repair raised by a request from a customer (via the call centre) or highlighted via other repairs being completed within a property – referral to the Team Leader Repairs
- Recharges for garden clearance of occupied properties or storage of furniture following eviction – referral to Area Housing Manager.

REPAIRS & VOIDS RECHARGE POLICY

Doc. Ref:	BTS PL 005
Issue:	3
Amended:	1/09/2022
Page:	6 of 6

Equality and diversity

PCH recognises that it operates in a community within which there is wide social diversity and is committed to providing equal opportunities and valuing diversity.

Through the management of our housing stock we aim to treat all customers fairly, and with respect and professionalism regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status.

This policy has been designed to be fully inclusive regardless of the ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious belief, or disability of service users or residents.

The policy has been developed giving full consideration to the PCH Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Links to other policies

- Responsive Repairs policy
- Allocations policy
- Incomes policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy
- Financial Regulations