

Alternative Accommodation Policy (Decant)

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1. Introduction

This policy outlines Hillingdon Council's approach to managing the rehousing of residents, whether temporarily or permanently, when it is necessary to move them from their existing home to enable repairs, modernisation, or redevelopment works. As a landlord, the Council is obliged to keep the structure and exterior of its residential properties in good repair. While most works are carried out with tenants in situ, a "decant" is required when the health and safety of the tenant would be at risk or works are too extensive to be performed while the property is occupied.

2. Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that decants operate in a fair, equitable, and transparent manner. It aims to:

- Provide tenants with a clear understanding of their options, rights, and responsibilities regarding temporary or permanent rehousing.
- Minimise disturbance to households and provide necessary financial and practical support.
- Ensure statutory compliance with health and safety regulations, including Awaab's Law.
- Enable the Council to complete essential repairs and redevelopment to make the best use of public resources.

3. Legislation and Regulation

Our approach is underpinned by the following legal and regulatory frameworks:

- **Landlord and Tenant Act 1985:** Sets out the Council's basic repairing obligations.
- **Housing Act 2004 (HHSRS):** The risk-based method used to assess health and safety hazards.
- **Awaab's Law (2025):** Mandates strict timeframes for investigating and fixing damp, mould, and other hazards.
- **Land Compensation Act 1973:** Governs statutory Home Loss and Disturbance payments.
- **Equality Act 2010:** Ensures no person receives less favourable treatment based on protected characteristics.

4. Types of Decant

Decants fall into three primary categories:

- **Emergency (Unplanned):** Required when an unexpected event (fire, flood, structural failure) makes a property immediately uninhabitable.
- **Planned (Temporary):** Arranged for major repairs or modernisation (e.g., damp-proofing) that make the home unsafe or impractical to occupy during works.

- **Planned (Permanent):** Necessary when a property is scheduled for demolition, disposal, or redevelopment where the tenant will not return to the original unit.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Council Responsibilities

- **Repairs Team:** Conducts initial assessments and provides technical recommendations for decants, ensuring safety work is identified.
- **Neighbourhood Officers (NHOs):** Act as the "Single Point of Contact" for the tenant, coordinating the move.
- **Neighbourhood Managers:** Oversee policy implementation and authorise emergency accommodation and financial payments (where applicable).
- **Allocations Manager:** Sources and places tenants into temporary alternative accommodation and manages permanent rehousing.

Tenant Responsibilities

- **Cooperation:** Tenants must cooperate with the decant process and provide necessary information to facilitate the move.
- **Access:** Tenants are legally required to allow reasonable access for inspections and works. Refusing access for Awaab's Law repairs may lead to legal enforcement.
- **Packing and Clearing:** Tenants must pack their belongings and leave the home clean and clear of unwanted items before the move.

6. The 48-Hour Rule and Offers

Due to acute housing pressures, alternative accommodation is often limited.

- **The 48-Hour Move-In:** Once a suitable property is identified and ready, residents are expected to move within 48 hours
- **Direct Offers:** For temporary moves, the Council will usually make a single direct offer of the first available property that meets core requirements.
- **Refusal and Final Offer:** For permanent moves, if a first offer is refused, a second and final offer will be made. If a tenant unreasonably refuses two suitable offers, the Council may seek a court order to secure the move.

7. Accommodation Costs

- **Rent Equivalence:** For temporary decants, tenants continue paying rent for their principal home. The Council covers the rent for the temporary property.
- **Utilities and Council Tax:** Tenants are generally responsible for Council Tax and utility bills at the temporary address. Special rules apply for District Heating.

- **Delayed Return:** If a tenant refuses to return home within 48 hours of works completion, they may be charged rent and Council Tax for **both** properties.

8. Vulnerability and Support

The Council prioritises residents affected by age, disability, or other vulnerabilities.

- **Tailored Support:** Neighbourhood Officers will agree on a support plan that includes help with removals, utility switching, and minor adaptations (e.g., grab rails) at the decant property.
- **Communications:** Information will be provided in accessible formats, and Neighbourhood Officers may liaise with nominated representatives or carers.

9. Financial Support

- **Disturbance Payments:** Covers reasonable, documented moving expenses (removals, appliance reconnection, mail redirection) to ensure the tenant is not financially worse off.
- **Home Loss Payments:** A one-off statutory payment for tenants permanently displaced by redevelopment, provided they have lived in the property for at least 12 months.
- **Arrears:** Any outstanding rent arrears or housing debts will be deducted from these payments.

10. Behaviours, Competencies and Professional Standards

As your landlord, we know our staff play an important role in providing a good housing service. Training is not only about helping staff do their jobs properly. It is also about making sure they understand how to support residents, deal with concerns fairly and respond in a professional way.

We want all housing staff to have the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours needed to provide a good service to tenants and leaseholders. This should lead to a better experience for residents, with staff who listen, communicate clearly, act consistently and respond appropriately to concerns about wellbeing, health and safety. We will know this is working if residents feel heard, treated with respect and more confident in the service they receive. Over time, we expect this to help build trust between the Council and residents, improve confidence in how we deal with anti-social behaviour and neighbour issues, and increase satisfaction with our housing services.

Governance			
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