www.oxford.gov.uk

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

To:	**Cabinet**
Date:	8 July 2026
Report of:	Director of Housing
Title of Report:	HRA Property Services Policies

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To request that Cabinet recommend that Council approve the following policies: complaints, lifting equipment and lifting operations, voids.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith – Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Good, affordable homes
Policy Framework:	HRA Asset Management Strategy 2025 -2028

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:

1. **Recommend** full Council to approve the draft Complaints Policy
2. Recommend full Council to approve the draft Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy
3. **Recommend** full Council to approve the draft Voids Policy

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Complaints Policy	No
Appendix 2	Equality Impact Assessment – Complaints Policy	No
Appendix 3	Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy	No
Appendix 4	Equality Impact Assessment – Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy	No
Appendix 5	Voids Policy	No

Appendix 6	Equality Impact Assessment – Voids Policy	No
Appendix 7	Risk Assessment	No

Introduction and background:

1. Further to the Cabinet and Council approving a series of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) policies, further policies are being presented to the Cabinet to ensure the safety of residents and ensure the good management of the housing stock.

2. The policies being presented to the Council fall into two broad categories – ensuring the safety of all residents and secondly, ensuring the good management of the housing stock and the need to treat residents with dignity and respect when, in extreme circumstances, tenants have to leave homes temporarily for urgent maintenance work to be undertaken.

3. Making sure residents have a safe, affordable and decent place to call home is the core purpose of this work. Successive Governments have been working to strengthen the voice of residents and introduce legislation to ensure the quality of homes.

4. In 2018, the then Government published the Social Housing White Paper to ensure residents of social housing are safe, listened to, live in good quality homes and have access to help when things go wrong. Consequently, the Social Housing Regulation Act ("the Act") received Royal Assent in July 2023. The Act forms a new regulatory framework for the social housing sector, aiming to give residents greater powers and improve access to quick and fair solutions to problems.

5. The Act aims to ensure Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are compliant with the consumer standards by giving the Regulator of Social Housing new powers to address RSLs who are not meeting their commitments to residents.

6. The Social Housing Charter detailed what social housing residents should expect from their landlords, including feeling safe in their homes, knowing how their landlords are performing and having their complaints solved quickly.

7. The Act sets out to deliver against each of these commitments:

- Residents to be safe in their home.
- Residents to know how their landlord is performing.
- Residents to have their complaints dealt with promptly.
- Residents to be treated with respect.
- Residents to have their voice heard by their landlord.
- Residents to have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.

8. Technical policies are therefore required to adhere to this regulatory regime. They are also key to ensure the effective operation of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) property service as it ensures that asset management services and the development of the social housing programme are set within a sound operating framework such as meeting key performance criteria, as well as ensuring sustainability objectives are met and monitored.

9. The ability to refresh policies ensures key KPIs can be refined to meet the contemporary needs of tenants and of the wider city in respect of the role of housing in attaining economic growth.

10. At the same time, the need to ensure high standards are maintained, such as guaranteeing gas safety standards are met and there is constant action to monitor and act on radon levels, can be attained by clear technical policies which ensures consistent follow through with operational work in addressing health and safety objectives.

11. The Council recognises its compliance responsibilities as well as the critical need to listen and act on the lived in experiences of our residents. There has been a series of meetings with the Residents Policy Review Group and survey work with residents which has amended and approved the policies which are being presented to Cabinet for approval with this report.

12. There is a need for a suite of other policies to be considered and approved by the Cabinet to meet these regulatory standards. It is envisaged that further policies, once they are considered by residents, will be presented to the Cabinet for approval.

Complaints Policy

13. This policy sets out the Council's approach to delivering an effective complaint handling service that meets both the regulatory requirements set out in the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024.

14. This policy aims to:

- Provide residents with a clear, accessible and efficient complaints process.
- Ensure residents understand how to make a complaint and their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- Ensure complaints are investigated fairly, consistently and impartially.
- Promote a positive culture of learning from complaints to improve landlord services provided by or on the behalf of the Council.
- Ensure compliance with all relevant legislation and regulatory requirements.

15 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the complaints procedures that social housing providers should follow.

16. The policy stipulates a two-stage process where complaints are assessed and considered impartially in the interests of providing a good service to all residents.

17. The Council will look beyond the circumstances of individual complaints and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from complaints. Using the complaint process in this way enables the Council to learn from the issues that arise for customers and to take steps to improve the services it provides.

18. The drafting of this policy has been undertaken in partnership with the Housing Ombudsman Service who have provided detailed guidance which has led to this draft policy being tabled to the Cabinet for consideration.

19. The Cabinet is asked to approve the draft Complaints Policy and commend the policy for approval to Full Council.

Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy

20. The Council is responsible for maintaining passenger lifts and for carrying out examinations and inspections to ensure those lifts operate safely. In addition to lifts, the Council has a responsibility to maintain stair lifts and hoists to ensure the safety of their tenants in their homes.

21. The Council must establish a policy which meets the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. In addition to this, the policy must provide assurance that measures are in place to ensure compliance with the Lifting Operation and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) and to identify, manage and/or mitigate risks associated with relevant lifting equipment.

22. The Council will endeavour to ensure that all lifts and lifting equipment in properties it owns and manages will be in full working order at all times. Where the Council becomes aware that lifts or lifting equipment are not operating as they should, emergency repairs orders will be issued to remedy faults as quickly as possible within the timescales as stated below:

Repair Type	Target response times following work order issued	Target fix time following work order issued	Comments
Emergency	Entrapment 1 hour	Fix where possible or make safe within 24 hours	Repairs needed to avoid danger to health, or that pose a risk to the safety of the safety service users.

			“Make safe” repairs may require a follow up visit to complete the repair.

Repair Type	Target response times following work order issued	Target fix time following work order issued	Comments
Emergency	Breakdown Within 4 hours during between 8am – 8pm – Monday to Sunday	Fix where possible or make safe within 24 hours For stairlifts where there is not a complete breakdown but faults are appearing, the response time is within the first 48 hours of the report of the fault having been made	Repairs that are a major cause of discomfort or inconvenience. “Make safe” repairs may require a follow up visit to complete the repair.
Emergency	Breakdown Within 4 hours – Out of Hours	Fix where possible or make safe within 24 hours	Repairs that are a major cause of discomfort or inconvenience. “Make safe” repairs may require a follow up visit to complete the repair.
Urgent	Within 24 hours	Fix within 5 days	These repairs do not cause immediate damage to the building, its occupiers, or neighbouring properties or user inconvenience
Routine	Appointment to be confirmed within 24 hours	Timescale to be agreed with the Council	This is for further works that may be required following a repair, Thorough Examination or Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) where the Council will advise of the target fix time

23. The Cabinet is asked to approve the draft Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy and commend the policy for approval to Full Council.

Voids Policy

24. This policy outlines our approach to managing empty properties ('voids'), to minimise the length of time a property stays empty. This will consequently reduce the loss of rental income and maximise income for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), while ensuring that applicants in housing need are allocated a suitable property as soon as possible.

25. A property is defined 'void' when no tenancy exists following vacation by the previous occupant, and no rental income is being received. The 'void period' exists between a tenancy ending and a new tenancy beginning.

26. The Council recognises the importance of working to specific timescales in handling voids as part of performance monitoring and ongoing review of operations. The contractor work targets are as follows:

- Minor works (assessed at inspection stages): 5 working days
- Standard Void: 15 working days
- Major Void: 25 working days
- Exceptional Voids; 90 working days

27. These contractor works targets do not represent the full end-to-end void turnaround target. The overall end-to-end relet period includes all stages of the void process, including tenancy termination, key return, inspection, specification, compliance checks, works, advertising, allocation, viewing, acceptance and tenancy sign-up.

28. The Council's indicative end-to-end standard void relet target is 35 calendar days, measured from the previous tenancy end date to the start of the new tenancy, excluding properties formally classified as major, exceptional, complex, or deliberately held for operational reasons. This target will be monitored alongside stage-based performance indicators to ensure that delays are identified and addressed across the full process.

29. A minor void is defined when minimal work such as minor cleaning, compliance checks and minor and or internal works lasting no more than 5 working days are required.

30. A standard void is defined a property requiring cleaning and routine repairs with no capitalised elements. This is distinct from a major void which requires significant work such as structural repairs, electrical rewiring, installation of kitchens and bathrooms or major adaptations as well as disability adaptations.

31. A major void refers to a vacant property that cannot be easily or quickly re-let, often requiring extensive, long-term, or specialised intervention before it can be brought back into use. Unlike a standard void (routine turnover), these properties are generally not habitable in their current condition, leading to higher maintenance, security, and renovation costs.

32. A major void includes:

- Structural repairs – these are works that are essential to maintain stability and weather resistance in the main structural elements of a dwelling ie floors, walls and roofs as determined by the surveyor. Major works to these elements will involve replacement or substantial reconstruction of the component or element.
- Site works – this is work around and specific to the dwellings involved and is essential to the safety, security and protection of tenants (eg the replacement or substantial reconstruction of unstable boundary walls, footpaths etc)
- Consequential and other works – these are works that are required as a consequence of major repairs such as reinstatement or making good finishes and fittings.
- Any works that significantly improve the dwellings (ie capitalised repairs) should only be classified as major repairs if they could not reasonably be carried out with a tenant in occupation.
- Emergency repairs constitute any defect that puts the health, safety or security of the tenant or a third party at immediate risk; or that affects the structure of the building adversely. These would qualify as reasons for classifying the property as needing major repairs.
- Asbestos removal – Notifiable asbestos works should be counted as major works. Non-notifiable asbestos works should be counted as standard void works.

33. An exceptional void refers to a property that is vacant but is excluded from standard re-letting performance targets due to specific, long-term, or non-routine circumstances. Unlike standard voids (short-term turnovers), these properties are often undergoing major, complex, or strategic work that prevents them from being occupied. This includes installation of components such as, for example, air source heat pumps.

34. The Cabinet is asked to approve the draft Voids Policy and commend the policy for approval to Full Council.

Financial implications

35. There are no financial implications for these policies, any work required under these policies will be funded from existing budgets and monitored in accordance with current financial management processes.

Legal issues

36. The policies being presented for approval are required under the Consumer Standard as set by legislation and the Regulator for Social Housing.

Level of risk

37. The failure of the Council to have these asset management policies would go against the Corporate Plan to keep residents safe and could lead to regulatory

infringements further to the requirements of the Regulator for Social Housing, the Health and Safety Executive and the Building Services Regulator.

Equalities impact

38. Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) has been carried out to determine whether the policies being presented to the Cabinet for approval would have an impact on any member of staff, tenants, or contractor workforce, which unfairly discriminates or disadvantages them in the context of the Equality Act 2010.

39. Whilst the EqIA has identified that there are no particular groups who will be unlawfully disadvantaged by these policies, it is identified that there are certain groups at increased risk from safety infringements. These groups are:

- children
- adults with learning difficulties
- oxygen users
- people taking certain medication
- those suffering the effects of drugs and alcohol
- adults aged 65 and older
- people with disabilities
- Individuals being supported by the Community Safety team and related support services

40. These policies aim to reduce the risks to these groups of people through proactively identifying these risk factors, raising awareness and education further to the Public Sector Equality Duty (s.149).

Conclusion

41. By approving these policies, this will help establish the framework to maintain the housing stock and further ensure the safety of our residents. This approval would also help meet the expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing that the Council is meeting its regulatory obligations. Further HRA policies will be presented to the Cabinet for its consideration after residents have been able to assess and, if necessary, amend draft proposals.

Report author	James Watkins
Job title	Housing Projects and Policies Officer
Service area or department	HRA Team
Telephone	01865 xxxxxx
e-mail	jwatkins@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:
List the background documents and, if possible, link to them.

All background papers must be listed in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. This includes, any material which discloses facts or matters on which the report or an important part of it is based and which have been relied on in the preparation of the report Each document must be listed and a copy of each document made available to members and the public on request, (or they should be directed where to find it if it is already published on the Council's website). All confidential, exempt, copyrighted and published works are EXCLUDED from this requirement.
1 Consumer Standard – Regulator of Social Housing - Regulatory standards for landlords - GOV.UK 2 Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 - Landmark Social Housing Act receives Royal Assent to become law - GOV.UK

This page is intentionally left blank