



**North Devon Homes**

**Planned Improvements Policy**

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## 1. Purpose

North Devon Homes will maintain all properties by providing routine planned improvements to both the fabric of the building and key components such as kitchens, bathrooms and heating.

Continual improvement of services to customers will be sought through regular reviews of home survey data, servicing and through Customer Satisfaction feedback.

We will regularly consult customers and other representatives to ensure that the policy and its procedures remain fit for purpose.

This policy sets out North Devon Homes' principles for the Planned Improvements service delivery and provides guidance on implementation.

North Devon Homes is committed to providing its customers with homes that are safe, comfortable and in line with the Decent Homes Standard.

All North Devon Homes' staff, Board Members and contractors are expected to adhere to the principles of this policy and to have individual and collective responsibility to ensure that this policy is applied.

We aim to deliver a quality Planned Improvement service that:

- Upgrades and modernises our existing housing stock for the benefit of our customers.
- Drives value for money through delivering quality products ensuring life cycles of components are maximized and contractors costs are kept competitive
- Enhances the value of our property assets.
- Engages customers on North Devon Homes' standards, choices and programmes of work.
- Improves the energy efficiency of our properties

- Considers fuel poverty and impact for our customers when specifying energy consuming installations.
- Is compliant with Health and Safety, statutory, regulatory, best practice aspirations and the Decent Homes Standard.

## 2. Principles

The following principles will apply to this policy:

- It will be open, fair and transparent.
- It will promote consistency in the approach to the Planned Improvement services.
- The Policy will undertake consultation with all stakeholders
- It will be realistic, achievable and provide value for money.
- It will be periodically reviewed to an agreed timescale.
- It will support our customer care standards.

## 3. Review

We will review this policy, related procedures and staff training needs at least once every three years or when Legislation changes, to ensure that it continues to operate within best practice, achieve measurable results, and deliver continuous service improvement.

The policy and all associated procedures will be reviewed immediately following any relevant change to government policy, regulation or legislation.

The Planned Improvements Manager will be responsible for ensuring that policy reviews are undertaken, that appropriate consultation takes place and that revisions are reported to the Executive Team.

## 4. Responsibilities

The Executive Team approves Policies and delegates responsibility to the Planned Improvements Manager for ensuring that it is communicated and implemented.

The Planned Improvements Manager will provide training for staff to ensure that they fully understand the wider issues surrounding this policy and the procedure.

## 5. Scope

This policy applies to the NDH Group and must be adhered to by all employees, Board Members, Customers, contractors (whether working in NDH offices or its homes), consultants and any other person granted access to data held or processed by NDH.

## 6. Policy Statements

### 6.1 Safety and Health

To provide assurance that all works will comply with Construction Design and Management 2015 Legislation (CDM) and that all roles are appointed as per the requirements.

We are committed to ensuring that all works are delivered in accordance with current Construction and Design Management (CDM) Regulations to ensure the safety of customers, contractors and staff.

We employ the services of an independent Safety Advisor who provides guidance and undertakes safety audits to active sites on a regular basis.

A duplicate copy of the Audit report is provided to the Contractor who reports back on actions at the next Project meeting.

The prestart procedure is:  
Preconstruction information is provided by the client (NDH) to the appointed Contractor.

The Contractor develops the document into the Construction Phase Plan which we pass to our Safety Advisors for comments

The final worked up document is held by NDH in the Contract File.

The Construction Phase Plan will contain all the elements necessary to deliver the works such as, Method Statements (non generic but site specific), Risk Assessments, COSHH Assessments, CHIP, ideally registered in CHAS and procedures for Toolbox talks and inductions (non exhaustive list).

On completion of the Scheme the Contractor will provide a Health and Safety File to the client for future reference

Should any structural works or defects to properties be found or required we will engage with a Structural Engineer to ensure these works are safe and compliant.

## **6.2 Customer Engagement**

### Customer Choice

During Planned Improvement work there will be customer choice available (from a selected scope) for items such as:

- External wall paint colours
- Replacement front door style and colour
- Kitchen and bathroom floor colours
- Kitchen units & worktop style and colour choices.

Limiting product choice is a key ingredient for the success of our maintenance teams and reduces the number of replacement components being stocked. This increases efficiencies and helps reduce costs over the longer term.

## Customer Satisfaction

We will incorporate customer feedback to in the form of continuous improvement of planned works and results will be discussed at contractors' progress meetings.

## Non standard customer fittings

### *Range Cookers*

Where customers have fitted a large 'Range' style cooker to their kitchen this will not be able to be incorporated into a replacement kitchen. A Range cooker will typically take up more space than a standard 600mm wide cooker which may not be compatible for any future customers needs should a change of Tenancy occur. Where found to be fitted this could lead to additional costs of fitting new units and or worktops to amend apertures back to the standard 600mm space.

### *Lighting*

Where customers have installed their own lighting without permission and is found to be non compliant they are at risk of being recharged for its removal and returning the property to a compliant standard.

### *Stores either attached to or separated from the property*

During a rewire of a property if we find that unauthorized electrical installations have been extended from the property into these spaces the customer is at risk of these being disconnected from the home fuseboard where they are non compliant.

These spaces were not typically designed for storage of items that require a completely dry environment and are not habitable spaces.

They are not suited to positioning white goods for example or soft furnishings.

Where extensive unauthorized works have taken place the customer is at risk of having these disconnected and recharges imposed accordingly.

Lighting to these outside spaces however would remain as part of the original specification for the property.

### *Replacement Kitchen and bathrooms*

Where a customer has installed a kitchen and / or bathroom without permission or to the required standard for our homes they are at risk of being recharged for their removal and subsequent replacement.

### Recharges

The Planned Improvements Service reserves the right to apply recharging in the following instances:

- Where we wish to undertake a Home Survey we will contact customers by letter, telephone and text message. Where we have escalated our attempts to contact customers with further letters and calls we will outline a final appointment which if not fulfilled will require a recharge payment of £46.
- Where we have consulted with customers, taken a choice and ordered a replacement door for your home we reserve the right to recharge the cost of the door if you will not allow access for fitting.
- Where a kitchen or bathroom requires complete replacement prior to its prescriptive life cycle we will consider the length of the Tenancy in relationship to the original install date of the component. A recharge will result if we feel there is sufficient evidence to support premature failure has occurred through non normal 'wear and tear' conditions.
- Where essential planned improvements need to be undertaken such as rewiring or replacement boiler / heating works good access to the property will be required. Where instances of hoarding type activity have taken place we will work with the customer to facilitate a mutually agreeable approach. This will provide space for the contractor to undertake the works safely and within a reasonable time. We reserve the right to recover some or all of the costs relating to this approach which will be communicated right through the process.

- Where we become aware of an unauthorised solid fuel installation such as a woodburner we will engage with the customer to ensure the system is safely decommissioned. Where these installations have impacted on the structure or function of the property we reserve the right to undertake rectification work ourselves and pass these costs onto the customer.
- During planned improvement works should unauthorised alterations be found whilst particular works are ongoing such as non compliant lighting (installed by the customer) during a rewire we reserve the right to take corrective actions which we may recharge to the customer.

### Refusals

As a caring responsible Landlord we understand that it may not always be convenient or appropriate for us to undertake planned improvements to your home due to personal circumstance. This could be for examples such as ill health, family related difficulties or bereavement.

Where circumstances such as this prevail we will be empathetic and explore possibilities to defer works to a more suitable time for you.

There are, however, two types of improvement work which we need to ensure are completed as soon as possible due to Health and Safety implications. They are:

- Electrical works - should a property fail a Periodic Electrical inspection or come to the end of its prescriptive life cycle we will seek to ensure that the property remains safe. This will involve heightened contact and ultimately legal implications to ensure safety is maintained.
- Gas fired boilers – once a boiler has reached the end of its prescriptive life cycle we will take additional advice from our Gas Servicing teams around replacement. Safety will be included in this assessment and legal implications could result if this work is being refused on grounds which we cannot support (outlined above).

## Compensation

There are occasions when compensation is appropriate for customers to claim which is clearly set out in the separate Compensation Policy.

In application to Planned Improvements this could be for example where a customer has fitted their own kitchen in accordance with the 'Permissions process' and subsequently leave the property.

A formula is applied to the age and cost of the kitchen to determine any residual value payable as compensation which is in accordance with the Housing Act 1994.

## Cluttered homes and Hoarding

This is an area which can prevent essential improvements taking place and requires proactive engagement to resolve.

Initially we will engage with the customer using a variety of teams to ensure the property is safe and viable for works to take place.

Where difficulty with engagement and progress is apparent we will use different approaches including, Customer2Customer, family members and disposal companies to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome.

Where costs are incurred we reserve the right to pass these on should this be appropriate and necessary.

### **6.3 Planned Improvements Performance Indicators**

The delivery results of Planned Improvement refurbishments are reported on a regular basis to the Board including performance and customer satisfaction.

They will also be reported in the Annual Report and newsletters

## 6.4 Pre Start Survey

In order for works to commence on any property a fully joined up approach with the Contractor and Customer needs to take place.

Once NDH and the Contractor have notified the Customer that their home is in the programme for installation works this process will be followed prior to commencement.

The Contractor will check the NDH Contractor portal for any customer needs or warnings.

The Contractor will contact the customer to arrange a pre start survey date on the dates supplied at the beginning of the contract, following the patch order advised by NDH.

The existing Asbestos survey will be included in the initial prestart pack for the visit by the Contractors representative and NDH Surveyor. Should any further sampling be required in light of the proposed works these will be arranged at this stage.

At the pre start survey the Contractor and NDH surveyor will discuss and agree works using the asbestos information. The pre start survey form will be completed and the information discussed with customer.

The Contractor can then book the works with a mutually agreeable time with the customer.

The Contractor must pass on **all the information** discussed and recorded in the pre start pack to **everyone** working in the property.

The Pre-start pack must be available on site at all times.

## 6.5 Home Survey

We undertake to Survey each property every five years to refresh our stock condition data which will determine our future programmes of work.

Components within the home do have prescriptive life cycles however these Survey visits are used to reassess condition during

this visit. All components will be reassessed during this visit with the exception of boilers and electrical installations which have compliance requirements which need to be followed.

During this visit an inspection of the loft will take place and should this space be found to be used for storage follow up engagement will take place to discuss clearing the items.

It is important to let the loft insulation work to its maximum efficiency by not being compressed with items and this will improve the thermal efficiency of the property.

## **6.6 Environment and Sustainability**

Planned Improvements service will:

- Consider environmental and sustainable principles in its planned improvements by ensuring project waste plans are monitored regularly and exploring new initiatives.
- Require its contractors to monitor and reduce waste
- Install 'A' rated energy efficient boilers and appliances
- Install energy efficient long-life light bulbs during electrical improvements
- Ensure lofts are topped up to a minimum 270mm (mineral wool) when we undertake any works to roofs or to improve eth energy efficiency of a property.
- Set targets to increase the average energy rating across the whole stock each year. This is a measurement of how efficient each property is and provides information about what measures could be taken to make improvements.
- A key area of investment for the future will be to enhance the energy efficiency of the Stock to ensure all homes are rated at Band C or above by 2030. This is set out in the current Asset Management Strategy and is supported by the Planned Improvements Policy.
- This will be achieved by working to improve lowest bandings first - for example properties in off gas areas are likely to be in

the highest priority due to the fuel and heating types available.

- The poorest performing properties (very lowest banding) will also be reviewed when they become void which may result in disposal.
- The principle areas of improvements in the future will be 'fabric first' principles however are also likely to consist of:
  - External wall insulation
  - External cladding and or rain screening
  - Energy efficient heating systems
  - Photo Voltaic roof panels
  - LED lighting
  - Improved controls for heating
  - Greater insulation focus
- We have been progressive in exploring new heating technologies and will remain open to incorporating new types of heating where compatible with our properties.
- Feedback and understanding from customers regarding any improvements is invaluable as this information helps us to gauge how the content and service is being received and delivered.
- Funding - we will be proactive in seeking external funding opportunities to supplement improvement programmes of energy efficiency.
- Undertake cavity wall insulation assessments where indicators within the property demonstrate this requirement. Where cavity wall insulation is found to have deteriorated it will be removed. It will be replaced in accordance with technical guidance for this area of work.
- Any central heating switches will focus also on customers electrical tariff and if any guidance can be provided to ensure they are achieving the best value. We work closely with an agency called Energy 361 who can provide specialist guidance, support and advice to customers.

## 6.7 Central Heating

### Overview

We will ensure a full heating and hot water system is provided for our Customers which is replaced on the replacement life cycle. We also reserve the right to change the type of central heating in your home to improve the energy efficiency of the property, reflect our commitment to climate change or more efficient systems for us to maintain where in particular they are no longer viable to maintain..

When any remaining solid fuel or oil fired central heating systems expire we will install alternative forms of heating which aim to improve the energy efficiency. This may include trialing new technology particularly in off gas areas where efficient heating alternatives are more challenging to achieve.

### Gas Fired Central Heating

Where existing gas fired systems are installed these will be replaced with new A rated energy efficient condensing boilers

Where a gas fired backboiler is fitted and replaced with a new combi boiler located in a new position such as a kitchen then the existing fireplace opening will be blocked up and gas fires will be removed.

Where replacement Economy 7 heating is required and there is gas available to the property we will no longer automatically switch to gas. A replacement Economy 7 heating system will be installed to include the Quantum high heat retention units.

### Solid Fuel

Where an existing solid fuel heating system is fitted this will not be replaced with a new appliance but will be replaced with an electric form of heating system.

Any existing fireplaces will be permanently blocked off and the chimney may be removed particularly where it is not financially viable to repair.

All guidance relating to solid fuel can be found in the separate Solid Fuel Policy

### Economy 7 Heating

The principle form of central heating in off gas areas is Economy 7 heating which has improved considerably in recent years. The units we fit are described as high heat retention units and are the most efficient available to the market.

They have lower running costs than previous units and have high heat retention technology. They can be controlled via a digital panel for temperature and times to come on and go off to Customers requirements.

We will ensure your home has a factory insulated hot water cylinder connected to off peak energy with a boost function which supplements the hot water provision but will be on the daytime tariff.

### Oil fired heating

When an oil fired boiler system requires replacement it will be decommissioned and replaced with an electric form of heating such as Economy 7.

Oil fired heating does not fit with the energy efficiency and low carbon ambition of the Company and the prohibitively volatile cost of oil is detrimental for customers to accommodate.

### Air Source Heating

Air source heating installations are already present in some of our homes however this form of heating is likely to be used in the future as part of a range of measures to a property such as building fabric improvement which will optimize its efficiency. It uses lower temperature radiators which are also slightly larger than traditional ones to achieve the desired thermal comfort.

## **6.8 External Decoration**

External decoration and repair will be determined by the maintenance requirements for each property occurring in cycles of up to 30 years duration.

For example where a property has been updated to uPVC fascia, soffit, windows, doors and brickwork elevations very little maintenance is required and will be at the maximum cycle (30 years).

The standard maintenance approach is for fascia, barge and soffits to be overclad with uPVC and replace gutters and rainwater pipes for new components. Rendered surfaces will be painted or have external wall insulation applied.

External decorations will however be prioritized for properties where additional issues may be at large and not just deployed on an aesthetic needs basis.

## **6.9 Asbestos**

Prior to any works commencing on our properties we will provide the contractor either with access to our survey data via a portal or provide this during a pre start works survey where we ensure the contractor understands the presence of the material within the context of the proposed works. If a customer does not provide access for an Asbestos Survey no Planned Improvements will be available to the Customer until this has been completed.

We will also undertake programmes of asbestos removal where the same construction detail occurs for example in a pipe casing that runs through each flat in a block.

This can also include deteriorating external drainage to the side of a house which can be replaced in modern plastics.

## **6.10 Procurement**

All Asset Management procurement will be in accordance with the Contract Standing Orders, value for money and maximise value from the Advantage South West procurement club. This allows us to achieve the best value available with the collective buying power of 90,000 homes across the south west.

## 6.11 Cat Flaps

Customers are required to request permission for a cat flap which will only be possible within the lower panel of a rear door. Should a customer subsequently move home we will reserve the right to recharge rectification of this install.

Cat flaps are not permissible in front doors, communal doors or fire doors.

## 7. Consultation

### Who has been consulted in developing the Policy?

Date	Consultation methodology	Challenge / impact / result
October 2021	Email and meetings within Asset Management	Useful feedback and discussion
December 2021	'Teams' meeting with customer group	Areas of policy revised to include customer feedback, offer of Customer2Customer involvement to be included and wider discussion around the service.

## 8. Does the Policy promote equality of opportunity?

8.1 Potential impact on each of the diversity "groups".

Strand	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Comments / evidence (if negative impact, how does the policy address this)?
Race	X			At the pre start stage of work in each home visits are made to each property where discussions take place with the customer to
Disability			X	
Gender	X			
Gender Reassignment	X			
Sexual orientation	X			
Religion or belief	X			
Age			X	
Rural issues			X	

Social Inclusion issues	X			determine any adjustments to service.
Pregnancy and maternity	X			
Marriage and civil partnership	X			

## 8.2 Does the Policy promote equality of opportunity?

The Policy promotes equality of opportunity within the broad spectrum of opportunities within Planned Maintenance to both influence service delivery with adjustments to service for example. It also provides an agile service which is flexible and able to respond to individual customers' needs.

<b>Next review date</b>	
Every three years December 2025	
	<b>Related Documents</b>