

Empty Property Grant Policy

1. GRANT SCHEMES

Ealing Council proposes to offer the following Empty Property Grant Schemes. The Council will pay up to 100% of the total cost of eligible works for both schemes, up to the maximum amount of grant awarded;

The Council is under no obligation to offer Empty Property Grants as they are discretionary and subject to availability.

Scheme 1 – Empty Property Grant

1. The maximum grant is **£15,000** per unit.

There shall be an incremental reduction in maximum grant depending on the number of units within the property.

The 1st unit is eligible for up to **£15,000** each. The next five are eligible for up to **£10,000** per unit. For more units, the maximum grant thereafter is **£5000** per unit.

2. Properties, ideally, should have been empty for a minimum of **6 months** to qualify for this grant. However, properties empty for less than 6 months can also be considered if funds are available and the property is suitable for accommodating households in need in the borough.
3. The Property is to be managed by a Registered Provider or by the landlord(s) themselves, provided they are accredited or become accredited within 6 months from the date the grant was approved.

4. Rent must be at an “affordable rent” level.
5. The Local Housing Allowance and TA subsidy will also be acceptable.
6. The property must be made available to the council for a minimum of 5 years.
7. The property must be ready for occupation within 12 months from the date of grant approval.
8. The property can be available for Council nominations through Social Services for 5 years.
9. Any deviations from this policy may be considered with the approval of the Director of Safer Communities and Housing.

Scheme 2 - The West London Better Homes Grant

1. All grants to be issued in accordance with the criteria set out by the West London Housing Partnership until all funds are exhausted.

Current grant conditions are attached as **Appendix 1**.

2. ELIGIBLE PERSONS

- 2.1 Any freeholder or leaseholder (with over five years of their lease to run) of a property which has been vacant for more than six months.
- 2.3 The applicant must not have a criminal conviction in respect of any offence relating to Housing Benefit, Council Tax, Tenancy Relations or Private Housing legislation within five years prior to the date of the application. For offences of serious fraud, this period will be extended to ten years. There must also be no significant debts to

the Council (for example, Council Tax arrears, charges in relation to works carried out in default for the owner, outstanding service charges for ex-Council dwellings).

- 2.4 The maximum total amount of grant monies per applicant shall be no more than **£100,000 in a financial year.**

3 ELIGIBLE PROPERTIES

- 3.1 Ideally the property should have been empty for at least 6 months at the time of grant approval. However, properties empty for less than 6 months can also be considered if funds are available and the property is suitable for accommodating households in need in the borough. Owners will be expected to provide proof of the vacancy period and this will be checked with Council Tax records.
- 3.2 The property must also have planning usage as residential or have consent for conversion. Grants will not usually be provided for speculative development and conversion of non-residential buildings. The exception is areas above shops which can be converted to flats and fail the Decent Homes standard.
- 3.3 Grant assistance will not normally be provided to the owner of an ex-Council dwelling which has recently been sold by the Council. Empty property grants are to increase the supply of affordable housing and a sale implies that the dwelling is surplus to requirements.
- 3.4 For a property to qualify for an empty property grant the owner must agree to rent it out through the Council for at least 5 years. For West London Better Homes Grants, it should be let out for the periods set out by the West London Housing Partnership (1 year for works to occupied properties, 2 years for works to empty properties).

4 ELIGIBLE WORKS

- 4.1 In all cases, where the required works may be subject to an insurance claim, the applicant will be required to pursue such a claim prior to any grant being determined.

- 4.2 We will not accept applications where works are undertaken in whole or in part on a DIY basis. The work must be undertaken by VAT registered contractors, including purchase of materials, and in most cases we will expect that to be a single contractor.
- 4.3 Works should not begin before the grant is approved. Otherwise, landlords run the risk of incurring expenditure before a grant offer is approved.

5 PRIORITISATION OF GRANTS

- 5.1 Where the number of applications for grants exceeds the budget allocation we shall prioritise funding for works to long-term voids where development would not occur without Council assistance.

6. ASSESSMENT OF GRANT APPLICATION ESTIMATES

- 6.1 At least three estimates are obtained for empty property grant applications, one for applications for the West London Better Homes Grant. The estimates need to be itemised and show quantities. The quotes are to cover only the eligible works.

Non-eligible works include the following:

- Redecoration (unless is floors, tiles etc. necessary for a kitchen or bathroom)
- Cosmetic works such as new carpets
- Gardening (unless there are hazards such as Entry By Intruders, Falling on Level Surfaces etc.)
- Construction of extensions, conservatories etc.

The cheapest of the submitted quotes will be chosen.

7 PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 All properties in receipt of grant assistance shall be managed either by a Registered Provider or by the owner(s) themselves provided they are an accredited landlord.

- 7.2 Where management of the property is by a Registered Provider, the tenants shall be nominated by the Council.
- 7.3 The grant will be repaid to the Council if the landlord fails to make the property available for the full 5 year term or fails to become an accredited landlord.
- 7.4 The Council reserves the right to cancel any grant application prior to payment should the conditions of grant not be met.

8 DISABILITY ADAPTATIONS

- 8.1 In the Inner Broad Rental Market Areas, properties are still likely to be unaffordable to benefit dependent households but other corporate needs could be met.
- 8.2 It is recommended that landlords with empty properties in the inner bands are encouraged to refurbish a property for rental to tenants with disabilities in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Allowance who will be exempt from the benefit caps. This includes people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental ill health. In addition to bringing properties back into use, this approach will increase access to suitable and accessible housing stock for disabled people and support the Council's objective to move disabled people who are placed in high cost residential care or temporary accommodation into settled accommodation.
- 8.3 A protocol which sets out the source of referrals and the process will ensure that people who are eligible for social care are given priority and that there is a support package in place to meet the tenant's needs . In cases where tenants are assessed as needing care and support, the tenant will use their individual budget to fund a support package provided by a separate organisation. Social Services will identify potential disabled tenants in need of housing and work in partnership with the empty properties team and private landlords to ensure that the proposed design and layout will provide accommodation that is accessible for disabled tenants.
- 8.4 Under this scheme landlords will be required to fulfil their obligations under the Equalities Act and make reasonable adjustments for disabled tenants e.g. providing

tenancy agreements in easy read versions for tenants with learning disabilities and ensuring robust arrangements for carrying out emergency, urgent and routine maintenance and repairs.