

Abandoned Goods Policy



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

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| Owner | <i>Jim Brennan</i> | | |
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| Purpose | <i>This policy outlines the framework, principles, and responsibilities for managing abandoned goods within Sandwell Council housing. It sets out how Sandwell Council will identify, record, store, and dispose of items left behind in properties, ensuring a fair and consistent approach that balances the rights of former tenants with the Council's duty to manage homes efficiently, minimise delays in re-letting, and comply with relevant legal and regulatory requirements.</i> | | |

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1. Purpose and Aims

1.1 Sandwell Council is committed to managing its housing stock effectively, ensuring properties are safe, secure, and available for re-letting within appropriate timescales. This includes the fair and lawful management of belongings left behind in Council properties.

1.2 The Council aims to ensure that the handling of abandoned goods is clear, transparent, and easy to understand, so residents and former tenants can have confidence in how their belongings are treated.

1.3 The Council is dedicated to treating residents and former tenants with fairness, respect, and dignity, recognising that a range of circumstances may result in goods being left behind.

1.4 Our purpose is to balance the rights of individuals to reclaim belongings with the need to manage public resources effectively and minimise delays in re-letting homes.

1.5 This policy outlines how the Council will:

- a) Comply with relevant legislation
- b) Take reasonable steps to contact former tenants
- c) Manage goods consistently and proportionately
- d) Reduce delays and associated costs
- e) Ensure clear and auditable decision-making

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to the management of abandoned goods in Sandwell Council housing.

2.2 It applies to:

- All Council-managed tenancies
- Goods left in properties after a tenancy ends
- Items left in garages, stores, and external areas

2.3 This policy does not apply to:

- Leasehold or shared ownership properties
- Temporary accommodation

2.4 Items in communal areas are managed under separate procedures, although disposal principles may apply.

2.5 This policy applies to all Council staff and contractors acting on our behalf.

3. What is Abandoned Goods to Sandwell Council?

3.1 Abandoned goods are items left in a property, garage, or storage area after a tenancy has ended or where the Council has taken possession.

3.2 This may include furniture, appliances, personal belongings, documents, vehicles, or externally stored items.

3.3 The Council will make a reasonable assessment as to whether goods appear unclaimed and act accordingly.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Abandoned Goods Responsibility

4.1.1 Tenants are required to leave the property clear of all personal belongings when they vacate, in line with tenancy conditions and the Council's lettable standard. This includes internal areas, gardens, lofts, garages, and any associated storage spaces.

4.1.2 Where goods are left behind, Sandwell Council will take a structured and proportionate approach to determine whether the items have been abandoned and whether there is an identifiable owner.

4.1.3 The Council will make reasonable efforts to contact the former tenant, or their representative where known, to provide an opportunity for the goods to be collected within a specified timeframe.

4.1.4 Where goods are not collected, or where contact cannot be established, the Council reserves the right to remove, store, donate, or dispose of the items in accordance with this policy and relevant legislation.

4.1.5 The Council will ensure that abandoned goods do not unnecessarily delay the re-letting of properties and will act in a timely manner to return homes to use.

4.2 Sandwell Council's Responsibilities

4.2.1 Sandwell Council will manage abandoned goods in a lawful, consistent, and transparent manner, ensuring that all actions taken are reasonable and proportionate to the circumstances of each case.

4.2.2 In doing so, the Council will:

- Carry out an initial assessment of goods left behind, including condition and potential value
- Take photographs and maintain clear records where appropriate
- Produce an inventory of items where they appear to have value or significance
- Serve notice in line with relevant legislation and tenancy conditions
- Make reasonable attempts to contact the former tenant using available information
- Store goods for a defined period where required or appropriate
- Dispose of or arrange the donation of goods once the notice period has expired
- Ensure any items containing personal data are handled securely
- Consider opportunities for reuse, recycling, or donation where appropriate

4.2.3 The Council will ensure that decisions are recorded and capable of being reviewed, particularly where items are disposed of without storage.

4.3 Tenant and Former Tenant Responsibilities

4.3.1 Former tenants are responsible for removing all personal belongings before vacating the property, including items stored in external areas or outbuildings.

4.3.2 They should ensure the property is left in a clean and clear condition, in line with tenancy requirements.

4.3.3 Former tenants are expected to provide up-to-date contact details where possible to enable communication regarding any outstanding matters.

4.3.4 Where goods are left behind, former tenants must respond to any communication or notice issued by the Council within the stated timeframe.

4.3.5 Former tenants may be held responsible for reasonable costs incurred by the Council in removing, storing, donating, or disposing of goods.

4.4 Notice and Storage of Goods

4.4.1 Where goods are identified, the Council will serve notice in accordance with relevant legislation where applicable.

4.4.2 Notice will be sent to the last known address and any other available contact details, and reasonable attempts will be made to establish contact.

4.4.3 Goods will normally be stored for a minimum period of one month from the date of notice, allowing the former tenant a reasonable opportunity to reclaim them.

4.4.4 Where no contact can be made, goods may be stored for up to six months before disposal or sale.

4.4.5 The Council will balance storage decisions against the need to minimise delays in re-letting properties.

4.5 Disposal of Goods

4.5.1 Where goods are not reclaimed within the specified timeframe, the Council may arrange for their disposal or donation.

4.5.2 Methods will be proportionate to the nature and condition of the goods and may include recycling or donation where appropriate.

4.6 Exceptions to Storage

4.6.1 In some cases, it will not be reasonable or practical to store goods, and items may be disposed of immediately.

4.6.2 This may include:

- Perishable or time-sensitive items
- Items that are hazardous, contaminated, or present a health risk
- Goods where storage costs would be disproportionate to their value

4.6.3 Decisions to dispose of goods without storage will be recorded with clear justification.

4.7 High-Value or Sensitive Items

4.7.1 Where items appear to have financial or personal importance, the Council will take additional care and may retain them for longer where practicable.

4.8 Vehicles and Large Items

4.8.1 The Council will take reasonable steps to identify the owner of any vehicles or large items left behind.

4.8.2 Vehicles may be removed in line with statutory powers where required.

4.9 Rechargeable Costs

4.9.1 The Council may recover costs associated with removal, storage, and disposal of abandoned goods.

4.9.2 Charges will be applied in line with relevant policies and may be reduced in exceptional circumstances.

4.10 Data Protection

4.10.1 Items containing personal data will be handled and disposed of securely in line with legal requirements.

4.11 Sustainability

4.11.1 The Council will seek to minimise waste by reusing, recycling, or donating items where appropriate.

4.11.2 Staff and contractors are not permitted to take items for personal use.

4.12 Insurance

4.12.1 The Council does not accept responsibility for insuring abandoned goods.

5. Related Documents

5.1 This policy aligns with:

- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
 - Tenancy Conditions
 - Tenant Handbook
 - Complaints Policy
 - Property Compliance Policy
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6. Legal Framework

6.1 This policy supports compliance with:

- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982
 - Tort (Interference with Goods) Act 1977
 - Data Protection Act 2018
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Care Act 2014
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7. Development of Policy

7.1 Sandwell Council recognises that the way we manage abandoned goods directly affects the safety, security, and satisfaction of tenants, leaseholders, and the wider community. Proper handling ensures

properties are safe, clear, and ready for re-let, while protecting the rights of former tenants.

7.2 This policy has been developed in consultation with Housing senior managers, operational teams, and legal advisors to ensure it reflects operational needs, regulatory requirements, and the Council's commitment to fairness and transparency.

7.3 Sandwell Council is committed to ensuring that tenants and residents have meaningful influence over how abandoned goods are identified, managed, and disposed of. Their input helps us maintain a service that is fair, consistent, and trusted.

7.4 Residents will be given opportunities to contribute to the development and review of this policy through:

- Consultation exercises;
- Tenant panels and forums;
- Feedback linked to service delivery and experiences during voids or property clearances.

7.5 This policy provides assurance that tenant experience, fairness, and trust are central to how Sandwell Council manages abandoned goods, including storage, disposal, and recharge procedures.

8. Equality and Diversity

8.1 Sandwell Council will ensure equal and fair access to services and will consider individual circumstances when applying this policy.

8.2 The Council recognises that goods may be left behind due to vulnerability, ill health, or difficult life events, and will take a proportionate and sensitive approach.

8.3 All individuals will be treated with dignity and respect in line with the Equality Act 2010.

8.4 Reasonable Adjustments

Sandwell Council is committed to making reasonable adjustments for residents who may face barriers in accessing information or engaging with abandoned goods procedures. There is no fixed list of adjustments; each case is considered individually to ensure solutions are fair, practical, and proportionate.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Providing notices, inventories, or correspondence in alternative formats (e.g., large print, easy-read, or accessible digital versions);
- Offering additional support or advocacy to help residents understand processes;
- Allowing flexible arrangements for collection or retrieval of goods;
- Providing translated information or interpreter support where required.

Residents can request reasonable adjustments:

- In person;
- In writing (letter, email, or text);
- By telephone;
- Through an authorised representative;
- Or via suggestion by Council staff where it would support the resident.

All requests will be handled sensitively and confidentially. Where an adjustment cannot reasonably be made, the Council will provide clear explanations. Adjustments agreed will be implemented without unnecessary delay.

For further guidance, refer to Sandwell Council's Reasonable Adjustments Policy.

8.5 ST*R Model

Sandwell Council applies the ST*R model to ensure that our approach to

abandoned goods is supportive, fair, and respectful. This model is built on three principles:

- **Strengths-Based Approach** – Staff are encouraged to recognise and use residents’ engagement and feedback to make fair decisions.
- **Trauma-Informed Approach** – We acknowledge that the circumstances surrounding abandoned goods may involve stress, vulnerability, or crisis. Officers are expected to handle cases sensitively and respectfully.
- **Relationship-Based Approach** – Positive, respectful interactions with residents and former tenants underpin the policy. Open communication and clear explanations are provided wherever possible.

9. Monitoring and Review

9.1 This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains compliant with legislation, best practice, and Council standards. Reviews will consider operational effectiveness, resident feedback, and changes in legal requirements to ensure abandoned goods are managed fairly, safely, and consistently.

10. Policy Document Version Control

| Version | Date | Description | Updated By | Approved By |
|---------|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|-------------|
| 0.1 | 23 rd March 2026 | Initial policy draft | Louis Bebb and Jim Brennan | |
| 0.2 | 7 th May 2026 | Updated document following feedback at Joint Housing and Asset Management meeting. | Louis Bebb | |

