



**VOID POLICY**

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# **VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY**

## **1.0 Introduction**

There are various reasons why a property becomes void and different categories of voids, e.g.:-

- the tenant has terminated their tenancy and the property is awaiting re-let
- tenant has died and there is no-one to succeed to the tenancy
- property has been abandoned
- tenant has been evicted
- property is awaiting re-development or undergoing other major works

## **2.0 Aims and Objectives**

- 2.1 Ensure clear policies and procedures that are easily managed and clearly understood by both staff and tenants alike, to encourage good staff liaison and tenant awareness.
- 2.2 Minimise void periods and resultant loss of rental income to the Association, by ensuring all properties are let as quickly as possible.
- 2.3 Ensure effective estate, property and tenancy management that will assist in minimising void turnover and encourage community stability.
- 2.4 Utilise good void management as a means of addressing housing need quickly and reducing end of tenancy arrears and recharges.
- 2.5 Enable effective monitoring of void management policy and procedures, by using pro-formas, setting clear targets and benchmarking with other organisations.
- 2.6 Comply with Good Practice Guidance, Performance Standards and other legal and regulatory requirements.
- 2.7 Ensure the Association's Equality and Diversity Policy extends to void management and that no person or group of persons is unfairly treated because of their race, ethnic or national origin, religion or religious beliefs, age, gender, sexuality or sexual orientation, disability including physical, learning or mental health, appearance, marital status, people suffering from HIV, financial status or current residency status.

### **3.0 Void & Re-let Targets**

- 3.1 Letting voids will arise where a tenant has terminated their tenancy and is moving either within or out with the Association area. Where the tenancy has been terminated in the proper manner and the statutory 28 days notice has been given, the Association will aim to re-let the property within the target timescale set within our Business Plan.
- 3.2 Where the void is due to the death of a tenant, abandonment or repossession, and/or the statutory 28 days notice has not been given, the Association will still aim to re-let the property within the target timescale set within our business plan. . However, this may not always be possible where e.g. extensive repairs, medical adaptations, service connections or third party involvement is required.

### **4.0 Tenants' Responsibilities and Rights**

- 4.1 The Association will ensure that tenants are made fully aware of their rights and responsibilities in regard to ending their tenancy, via the tenancy agreement, information given at sign-up, tenants' handbooks and newsletters etc.
- 4.2 Prior to leaving, tenants will also be provided with a procedural checklist of information in regard to the statutory notice of termination, their Right to Compensation for Improvements and their responsibilities regarding rent, repairs, condition of the property, keys, etc
- 4.3 The Association will normally expect outgoing tenants to allow access for routine inspections and viewings prior to their moving, unless there are specific circumstances that prevent this.
- 4.4 Where rechargeable repairs and/or alterations have been identified, tenants will be notified and must attend to them prior to the termination date, otherwise the Association will carry them out and recharge the former tenant.
- 4.5 If the tenants rent account is in credit, no refund will be given until the Housing Officer and Technical Officer are satisfied that the property has been left in an acceptable condition. The tenant will be advised of the reason for delaying any rent refund and if possible agreement obtained to put the credit towards the cost of repairs.
- 4.5 Outgoing tenants' reasons for leaving will be monitored to highlight any problem patterns in regard to the management, maintenance or service provision of the Association.

## **5.0 Inspections**

- 5.1. Pre-termination inspections will be carried out with the outgoing tenant present, to allow the condition of the property, including any adaptations, gardens, bin store areas, cellars, lofts and the close in general to be assessed against the lettable standard and any alterations or repairs to be identified, whether the responsibility of the Association or the tenant.
- 5.2. Where possible, a final inspection may be conducted on or near to the termination date, to check the property has been left in a satisfactory condition and the tenant has attended to any repairs due by them, or has signed an agreement to be recharged for outstanding works.
- 5.3. A void inspection will always be essential once the keys are available, to identify whether the property is of lettable standard, or arrangements require to be put in place to ensure the property meets that standard.
- 5.4. All statutory inspections and repairs, e.g. gas and electrical safety checks and lock changes will be carried out before the new tenant moves in and appropriate certificates issued to the incoming tenant. Non-essential repairs may be done after the new tenant moves in, to minimise void periods.

## **6.0 Death of the Tenant**

- 6.1. Where the tenant has died and there is no successor to the tenancy, formal notice will not apply. The Association will normally allow the next of kin up to 10 working days to clear the property, although this will be open to discretion. The Association will also have discretion to claim the tenant's estate for any rent loss.
- 6.2. Where no next of kin comes forward to act on behalf of the tenant, the Association will endeavour to trace them via emergency contacts, neighbours, social services, etc.
- 6.3. The Association will aim to re-let the property within the target timescales set in our Business Plan., except in extreme cases where there is no next of kin or will, when legal advice and appropriate proceedings would ensue.

## **7.0 Abandoned Properties**

- 7.1. Where the Association has reasonable grounds for believing a property has been abandoned and has conducted intensive investigations to satisfy this belief, the statutory abandonment procedures will be instigated and notices served in accordance with Section 17 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

- 7.2 If the tenant fails to collect their belongings by the repossession date, the Association will take a full inventory and then dispose of it, unless its value exceeds the cost of storing it plus any rent or other arrears the tenant owes in relation to their tenancy, in which case it will be stored for up to 6 months before disposal
- 7.3 A full list of abandonment procedures is included in a separate Abandonment Procedures
- 7.4 Any repairs deemed to be rechargeable will be pursued in accordance with our rechargeable repairs policy

## **8.0 Safety and Security**

- 8.1 The Association will take reasonable steps to ensure that all void properties are both safe and secure at all times. Where a property is likely to be void for a lengthy period and/or is considered to be in a vulnerable condition, security measures such as steel sheeting to windows and doors will be used.
- 8.2 In the case of development voids or properties undergoing major works, fixed measures of security, e.g. 'boarding' and metal fences may be used and/or security personnel employed.
- 8.3 Where properties are void during the winter months additional precautions will be in place, e.g. regular inspections, draining down of pipes and heating systems or maintaining heating at frost settings, as appropriate.
- 8.4 The health and safety of staff and incoming tenants is paramount when viewing or inspecting void properties, therefore precautionary measures must be taken at all times; e.g. development voids must not be visited without proper safety wear; staff should carry mobile phones at all times, torches or spare light bulbs for void properties, etc. arrange all inspections and viewings in daylight hours and always do accompanied viewings.

## **9.0 Legal & Regulatory Issues**

- 9.1 The Association is aware of all legal obligations and regulatory requirements placed upon landlords and will ensure these are met within the terms of our void policy and procedures:-

## **10.0 Allocation Issues**

- 10.1 The Association will identify prospective tenants as soon as possible after notice of a void is received, to ensure housing need is addressed quickly; via up-to date waiting-lists, good liaison with referral agencies and implementation of the local Council's Homelessness Protocol.
- 10.2 Allocations to special referral agencies, e.g. where an agreement is in place, or via the Homelessness Protocol will be closely monitored to ensure void turnaround is not unnecessarily protracted.
- 10.3 Where possible, Properties will be pre-let via accompanied viewings while the outgoing tenant is in situ, to minimise void periods.
- 10.4 Formal offers of housing and accompanied viewings will provide prospective tenants with clear information about the property and surrounding neighbourhood, to help reduce refusal rates.
- 10.5 The use of pro-formas and operation of a minimum lettable standard will ensure fairness and accountability in the allocation of voids, and provide clear records for monitoring purposes.
- 10.6 Association staff will collectively ensure effective estate and tenancy management to minimise the risk of difficult to let or low demand properties, but will also have discretion to offer incentives, e.g. decoration allowances, close-cleaning, etc. or offer the properties to non priority applicants, where appropriate.
- 10.7 Reasons for refusals of offers of housing will be monitored to highlight any problem areas of management, maintenance or other external factors.

## 11.0 Void Standard

11.1 It is the Association's duty to let houses in a clean, habitable and tenable condition and to ensure compliance with statute, tenancy conditions and Health and Safety criteria. This duty includes an inspection of the property immediately prior to the commencement of the tenancy, for the purpose of ensuring the following standards are met:

<b>Living Room</b>	Check that Focal Point Fire is fully operational Gas void check to be completed prior to let If electric, electric void check will be completed prior to let.
<b><u>Kitchen</u></b>	Check all kitchen units / worktops / doors / drawers are fully functional and adjust if required.  Check washing machine / cooker connections are in place and appropriately sealed.
<b><u>Bedrooms</u></b>	Check that fitted wardrobes, if applicable, are properly secured and doors / sliders / mirrors are in good order.
<b><u>Bathroom</u></b>	Check all sanitary fittings for chips, cracks, rust and replace if required. Check toilet seat supplied and fitted properly. Sanitise shower head if fitted (legionella) Check provision of shower curtain
<b><u>General</u></b>	
Windows	All window catches, hinges and restrictors will be checked to ensure fully operational and to oil if necessary.
Doors	Check door closers if required (kitchen and front entrance) Check door handles soundly fixed.
Decoration	No account is taken of the standard of decoration or wall coverings. Decoration will be carried out if felt necessary to minimise void relet time.  Decoration allowances may be awarded if it is felt appropriate and that this will assist to reduce void relet time. . The amount awarded will be based on an assessment on a room by room basis by the Housing Officer
Radiators	Ensure all radiators are soundly fixed to walls and are in good condition

### **Cleanliness**

A sparkle clean will be carried out to all void properties prior to relet.  
All rubbish and former tenant appliances will be removed.

### **Planned Maintenance**

The Association may also carry out planned maintenance work during the void period should it be timely and convenient to do so.

### **Health and Safety**

#### **Internal**

Tenant fitted appliances will be removed. All non-standard fittings will be replaced with the Associations standard fittings.

#### **External**

Common areas, such as stair windows, landings, pathways, gardens and fences will be checked for repairs, graffiti, needles, etc., and appropriate works instructed.

## **12.0 Monitoring and Review**

- 12.1 Monitoring and control of void management procedures will be effected, by using standard letters and pro-formas, together with regular liaison between housing and technical staff.
- 12.2 Annual setting of performance targets and indicators will assist in achieving effective void management, while allowing year on year comparisons to be made.
- 12.3 Regular benchmarking with other organisations will be actively enabled through the GWSF Forums and via comparison with APSR and SCORE statistics.
- 12.4 The outcomes of all monitoring measures will form an integral part of any policy and procedural reviews.

## **13.0 Tenant Participation**

- 13.1 As with any service reviews, tenants and prospective tenants views will be encouraged via:-
  - sign-ups of new tenants and settling in visits
  - analysis of reasons for refusal
  - regular policy reviews, newsletters and open days and events

## **14.0 The Role of the Committee**

14.1 The Role of the Committee in the management of voids will include:-

- agreeing and reviewing Policy
- setting and reviewing targets for void loss
- monitoring outcomes of the Policy through reports
- considering complaints via the Complaints process

All information provided to Committee will be in a form where confidentiality and anonymity of tenants or prospective tenants is retained.

## **15.0 Complaints**

15.1 The Association has a separate Complaints Policy whereby a complaint regarding the following will be dealt with:-

- the outcome of a Policy
- the treatment by a staff member
- how the applicant has been dealt with

Applicants may request a Complaints Form and Leaflet and Copy of the Policy if they choose to complain about any aspect of the above. Every applicant has final recourse to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

## **16.0 Policy Review**

16.1 The Policy will be reviewed every 3 years from date of approval.

## **17.0 Alternative Formats**

17.1 As with all the Co-operative's policies and procedures, this document can be made available in full and in part on tape, in large print, in braille and in translation into most other languages.