



VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

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1. Objectives

ng homes are committed to maximising its rental income and making the best use of available stock, through the efficient and effective control of empty properties, known as voids. Void properties are defined as "houses for which there is a current rent account, but for which no current tenancy exists, thereby incurring a rent loss." This broad definition applies to all voids, whether the houses are empty for one day or other longer period.

As ng homes main source of income is derived from rents and service charges, steps need to be taken to minimise the length of time between tenancies. The Void Management Policy has been developed to ensure that good performance is both regularly achieved and further built upon.

The primary objective of this policy is to minimise void periods between tenancies. Whilst ensuring sensitive letting to develop balanced and sustainable communities.

Good void property management is based on Housing Services managing the process effectively and working closely with the outgoing tenant and as necessary, with other agencies or partners. It involves dealing with three key areas:

- Tenancy termination
- Identification and completion of any work to the property
- Letting and occupation

To underpin and achieve this objective the policy also aims to ensure that:

- The Association meets all its legal, contractual and regulatory obligations
- All the Association's properties are allocated in the same high lettable standard
- The Association's financial stability and viability is protected
- Properties are let as quickly as possible
- The Association helps address the housing need in its area as effectively as possible
- The Association's properties remain desirable and in high demand
- Other related policies and procedures complement and support the aims and objectives of the Void Management Policy.
- Void costs are minimised whilst not compromising the Association's standards.

- Low demand and hard to let properties are quickly identified and remedial strategies implemented.
- The Association continues to meet the demands and expectations of potential tenants with regards to standard of accommodation offered.
- There is clear statement of Association's service and standards in relation to void properties

2. Tenancy Termination – End of Tenancy Inspection

Housing Officers will carry out a pre-termination inspection as soon as possible within the 28 days' notice period. All void properties will be inspected by the Housing Officer and Void Officer within 24 hours of receipt of the keys, where a Void Property Inspection Form will be completed and retained on file. The main purpose of these visits will be to:

- Explain to the outgoing tenant the Association's Tenants Rewards Scheme, makes available a reward of £50 for tenants who follow the correct procedures when terminating their tenancy. To qualify for this incentive, tenants must give 28 days' written notice, allow access for an inspection of the property, repair or replace any damaged fixtures or fittings and return all keys for the property. They should also have no outstanding debts due to the Association
- Identify any repairs for which the outgoing tenant is responsible and instigate recovery through the debt recovery procedures.
- Identify any repairs which the Association would be required to carry out.

3. Void Period

In line with definition from the Scottish Housing Regulator a void period will be "the time, measured in calendar days, between the date of termination of a previous tenancy or repossession and the start of a new tenancy".

4. Void Costs

Void costs cover the cost to the Association of all works undertaken to a property during the void period, including:

- Gas safety inspection
- Electrical safety inspection
- Servicing of windows and doors

- Energy Performance Certificate
- All other required repairs to meet lettable standards – this can include rechargeable repairs.
- If the void is programmed to be part of a future Internal Investment programme, then this work will be carried out while the property is void.

Staff time for end of tenancy inspections and void inspections and administration is not included in void costs.

5. Void Loss

Void loss refers to the rent that is not collected during the void period and therefore is lost income for the Association.

This void loss in each quarter will be presented to the Board as a percentage of the gross annual rental income. The percentage void loss will be monitored against the Association's target of 0.7%.

6. Identification and Completion of any Work to the Property

All void properties will be inspected by the Housing Officer and Void Officer within 24 hours of receipt of the keys, where a Void Property Inspection Form will be completed and retained on file. The Housing Officer will be responsible for the work ordered and will ensure the work ordered brings the property in line with the Associations void standard.

If damp, mould or condensation is identified within a void property then the Void Officer is responsible for following the Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy and Procedure. The Void Officer must ensure the cause of the damp, mould or condensation is identified and rectified within the property.

The Housing Officer should monitor progress being made daily for each void property to enable vacant properties to be let as quickly as possible, thereby minimising rent loss.

7. Minimising Void Costs and Loss

The Association will seek to ensure that all policies and procedures that could contribute to minimising void periods and void costs are implemented efficiently and effectively.

8. Allocation of Void Properties

Void properties will be allocated in line with the Association's Allocations Policy and the process of identifying a new tenant will be started as soon as the Association is made aware that the property is or will be available for letting.

Wherever possible the property will be allocated before the property becomes vacant to allow the new tenancy to start as soon as all required repairs have been carried out.

The Housing Officer will identify where adaptations have been made and where possible, will endeavour to allocate the property to suitable applicants who will benefit from the adaptation.

It is our aim to have the property allocated and re-let within 25 working days of the previous tenancy ending.

9. Tenancy Sustainment

The Association will while trying to minimise lost rent, seek to ensure that lets are made in a sensitive manner to meet new tenants needs, while developing sustainable communities. Key factors in this process are:

- The Association will take every opportunity to advertise and reinforce information to assist applicants sustain their tenancy by providing advice and support using the Housing Options model before and during tenancies.
- Meet housing need so that housing applicants do not wait longer than necessary in unsuitable or inappropriate housing.

10. Lettable Standards

The Association has lettable standards for void properties. These set down minimum requirements for tenants to attain prior to leaving a tenancy and for the Association to achieve prior to releasing a property to a new tenant. The Void Letting Standards are given in the Appendix.

11. Performance Monitoring

Void Management performance monitoring centres on 4 key aspects:

- time taken to relet properties,
- the average cost of bringing voids up to a lettable standard
- the average time to complete void repairs
- tenancy sustainment.

Quarterly reports from staff will enable the Finance, Performance and Risk Committee to monitor the Association's performance against agreed targets, both on an overall basis and within Neighbourhoods and patches. The results will be used to inform our future target setting process.

Performance is also benchmarked annually against a range of similar local housing providers, thereby enabling any changes to working practices to be introduced as necessary considering any performance issues that become apparent.

The Association will also monitor the following aspects of the void process to make any adjustments in our policies or processes:

- Identify and deal with issues arising from low demand areas or in recognised difficult to let properties. The Association will consider the use of incentives or letting initiatives to boost demand.
- The Association will ensure that it has in place sufficient suitably experienced contractors to carry out its repairs programme to meet agreed quality standards and within the agreed time for returning voids.
- Information gained from void property inspections and refusal information will assist in contributing to the Association's longer-term maintenance investment plans and priorities. It will also inform us on action required on any sustainability issues.

12. Low Demand and Hard to Let Properties

Definition

Properties will be categorised in line with the definition from the Scottish Housing Regulator which states that a property will be classed as Low Demand or Hard-to-Let where one of the following definitions is applicable:

- There is a small or non-existent waiting list for the property
- Offers of tenancy are refused frequently (i.e. 3 or more times) for reasons not related to the property or the areas
- The turnover of tenancies is higher than normal for other properties in the area

13. Initiatives and Strategies

Although the priority for the Association will always be to avoid any of its properties becoming unattractive to potential tenants it recognises that there are several factors that may contribute to a property becoming hard-to-let and/or low demand that are out with its control.

The Association will monitor turnover of stock, refusal rates and waiting list demand to identify potential difficulties in letting any individual property or allocating within any area. Where a property or an area does become hard-to-let or is in low demand, the Association will consider appropriate initiatives to ensure that void periods are minimised in the short term and, in the longer term, strategies to make those properties more desirable.

Initiatives and strategies that will be considered will include:

- Marketing the properties
- Offering incentives
- Local letting plans
- Intensive estate management
- Leasing agreements with other agencies

14. The Right of Appeal

Any appeals or complaints in relation to this policy, its implementation or its operation will be dealt with in line with the Association's Complaints Policy. A copy of the policy will be made available on request.

15. Other Related Strategies, Policies and Procedures

- Abandonment Policy and Procedures
- Allocations Policy and Procedures
- Asbestos Management Policy and Procedures
- Alterations, Improvements and Compensation Policy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Complaints Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy and Procedure
- Data Protection Policy
- Electrical Safety Policy and Procedures
- Electrical Safety in Multi-Storey Blocks Policy
- Emergency Lighting in Multi-Storey Blocks Policy
- Fire Safety Policy and Procedures
- Fire Safety in Multi-Storey Blocks Policy
- Gas Safety Policy and Procedures
- Legionella Risk Assessment Process
- Medical Adaptations Policy and Procedures
- No Access Policy
- Rechargeable Repairs Procedures
- Recovery of Debt Procedures
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Risk Management Strategy
- Tenants Right to Repair Policy
- Water Systems and Legionella Policy
- Void Procedures

16. UK General Data Protection Regulation 2021 (UK GDPR)

The ng group will treat your personal data in line with our obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2021 (UK GDPR) and our own Data Protection Policy. Information regarding how your data will be used and the basis for processing your data is provided in our Fair Processing Notices. The organisation will treat your personal data in line with our obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulation and our own

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17. Equality Impact Assessment

This Policy is equally applicable to all. It is recognised that in applying this Policy any necessary action will be taken where appropriate, including making reasonable adjustments, to ensure that there is no detrimental impact to protected characteristics groups.

18. Review

This Policy will be reviewed every five years or earlier in line with regulatory or legislative guidance/changes or good practice guidelines.

Appendix – Lettable Standard

CLEANLINESS

- Removal of all rubbish, furniture, floor coverings, tenants' improvements where of poor standard/no value, tenant contents and belongings.
- Clean all floorboards, woodwork, cupboards, kitchen fitments, bathrooms including all sanitary ware.
- Clear house of all smells
- Removal of all contractors' waste and complete sweep and clean out.

EXTERNAL STRUCTURES & FACILITIES

- Gardens MUST be cleared of rubbish and made safe.
- Any structures e.g. sheds, outhouses, Anderson shelters etc. which are unsafe or in a state of disrepair must be removed.

PATHWAYS, STEPS, HANDRAILS, ETC

- Clearly defined and safe access routes from the public footpath to the front door
- Safe access from bin storage area to the public footpath
- Safe and clear access from rear door of property to drying areas
- Previous tenant's alterations improvements can remain insofar as they comply with standards
- Safe and secure steps
- Handrails secure and safe

LANDSCAPING (HOUSES)

- Grass areas will be left in a short maintainable condition. Trees, bushes, etc will be left in a safe, maintainable condition

FENCING

- Gates and boundary fencing must be safe and secure
- Fencing between neighbouring properties must be left in safe condition and will be repaired or sections replaced depending on cost effectiveness. Gates to be repaired or replaced as required. Fences and gates will become the responsibility of the incoming tenants to maintain thereafter.

BINSTORES

- Bin stores should be in a safe and usable condition.

DRYING AREAS AND FACILITIES

- Clothes poles and rotary driers should be in a usable safe condition.

ROOFS

- Where possible, roofs should be free from major disrepairs and are safe.

EXTERIOR WALLS

- Exterior walls should be checked for cracks, damage to, or deterioration in its condition and any unsafe parts made good before letting.

RAINWATER SYSTEMS

- Gutters and downpipes must be safe and secure, correctly fixed and if leaking or sagging repaired/adjusted
- Downpipes which appear overgrown if extreme will require to be cleaned. This work can be implemented before or after the re-let (cross reference check to be made with downpipes/gutter cleaning programme).
- All drainage channels, grills, rodding eyes etc. MUST have safety grills or covers securely fitted.

PARKING & PARKING FACILITIES

- Where provided, any integral car parking areas must be left reasonably level, safe and tidy

ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS

- All electrics and appliances must be checked and in the main a full electrical periodical test & inspection is carried out and a test certificate provided, copied to new tenant
- All voids will have an electrical test undertaken at the commencement of the void, if at this point it does not comply with ng homes electrical standard the property will be brought up to the standard while the house is void, this work will include rewiring if required
- Generally, previous tenants' fittings will be removed, however certain appliances i.e. cooker extractor hoods, electric fires, showers, or exterior lighting can remain within the property if they meet standards, or it is reasonably cost effective to bring up to standard
- Smoke and CO alarms must be checked as part of the electrical check and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. Any missing smoke alarms must be replaced with hard wired type.
- All properties with any gas appliances MUST have a mains-wired Carbon Monoxide detector correctly installed. If no detector is fitted a detector MUST be correctly located within the property.
- Generally, tenant's cookers, hobs and ovens will be removed unless they are clearly in very good condition and of use to the new tenant. They will then be tested as part of the electrical checks. Incoming tenant will sign a mandate and take fully responsibility thereafter.
- Owned integrated electric hobs and ovens (in special needs and wheelchair houses) will be retained, tested, and repaired/replaced, if necessary, for new tenants.

LIGHTING

- Appropriate pendant, batten holder or enclosed fitting in each room
- Wall lighting left if meeting current standards when decoration is good and the new tenant accepts responsibility

FANS

- Mechanical extract fan in kitchen and bathrooms.
- Fans must be clean, operational, and free from noise with appropriate outside cowl/vent cover.
- Alternatively, if a positive ventilation system is in place, this will be checked to ensure it meet current standards.

STORAGE, PANEL, WALL AND PLINTH HEATING

- Each room in every property must have some heat source.
- Panel or storage heaters to be checked and fully tested, be clean, safe, secure, free from excessive damage.

SHOWERS

- Showers to be checked as part of electrical check and must be properly fitted within appropriate tiled/ wet wall area.
- If the installation does not comply with standards, then where at reasonable cost the installation can be made good then the shower should be left. If not, then the shower shall be removed and any necessary patching/repairs carried out.
- All showerheads and hoses must be renewed.

TELEVISIONS

- Television equipment i.e. aerials, cabling and outlets in the main will not be disturbed as part of void works unless deemed unsafe or outdated.
- Main TV outlet plates will be replaced by aerial contractor if damaged or outdated to ensure compliance with our current digital TV standards which includes a TV point in every living room and bedroom.

SATELLITE & CABLE

- Satellite dishes may be left if in a safe and reasonable condition. Any unsafe dishes must however be removed and cabling left tidy. If, however, the new tenant does not want the satellite dish, this can be removed at any time.

TELEPHONE CONNECTIONS

- Telephone containing systems to be left operational and safe including any extensions

FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

Interlinked Smoke and Heat Alarms

The following must be installed and confirmed as operational:

- Smoke alarm in the living room
- Smoke alarm in the hallway
- Heat alarm in the kitchen
- All alarms must be interlinked
- Alarms must be mains-wired or tamper-proof lithium battery
- Any missing or non-compliant alarms must be replaced immediately
- All smoke, heat and CO detectors must be to LD1 standard.

Fire Doors

Where fire doors are required, they must be checked to ensure:

- Self-closers operate correctly
- Gaps around the door are within tolerance (2–4 mm)
- Intumescent strips and smoke seals are intact
- Door leaf and frame are undamaged
- Hinges, closers, and ironmongery are compliant and secure

Any defective fire door must be repaired or replaced before the property is re-let.

Compartmentation and Fire-Stopping

The Housing Officer and Void Officer must inspect visible areas for any breach of fire separation:

- Gaps or holes in ceilings, walls and floors
- Unsealed pipe or cable penetrations
- Unprotected service risers

All breaches must be sealed using certified fire-stopping materials.

Common Areas (Flats and Multi-Storey Blocks)

The following common-area checks must be completed:

- Communal fire doors function and self-close
- Escape routes and stairways are clear
- No combustible storage in common areas
- Emergency lighting tested and operational
- Smoke vents (where fitted) unobstructed

Any failure must be reported and rectified prior to re-let.

VENTILATION

Mechanically vented systems or positive ventilation units must be fully operational and free of obstruction.

ASBESTOS

Before any work begins within the property, the Housing Officer and the Void Officer will ensure that there is an appropriate asbestos Refurbishment Survey in place. The contents of the asbestos survey will be recorded on the Association asbestos register and results made available to all contractors working within the void property. The Association will determine if the removal of any asbestos containing material will be possible on a case-by-case basis. The Housing Officer and the Void Officer will ensure they are familiar with the contents of the Asbestos Management Plan and WILL NOT allow work to commence without the appropriate asbestos survey information.

GAS

- All gas supplies, fires and gas central heating installations to be in a safe and operational manner ready for the incoming tenant. Landlord Gas Safety Certificate to be issued to the new tenant. Any unsafe gas fires beyond economical repair will be removed.
- Stand-alone gas cookers MUST be removed if in poor condition.

WATER SUPPLY

- All water outlets (especially shower heads) are to be run for 10 minutes at reinstatement to minimise the risk of legionella. The outlets must be run for 10 minutes each and not simultaneously.

PLUMBING

- Hot water cylinders checked for leaks, rust, appropriate controls, secure base and insulation. Testing, repairs and/or replacements to be carried out during re-let

WASTE PIPE WORK

- Clean out all traps. Ensure that appropriate waste pipework in place, safe, secure and operational with plug and chain assemblies.

SUPPLY AND SERVICE PIPE WORK

- Check condition of all hot and cold domestic pipework for leaks, damage and dead legs. Repairs/replacements affected during re-let.
- The condition of cold-water storage tanks should also be checked for corrosion. Tanks may need repaired/replaced and/or cleaned out.
- Stopcock checked for operation and position highlighted

TOILETS

- The WC should be secure, clean and free from damage and leaks.
- New toilet seat should be fitted.

TAPS

- Taps should be relatively easy to operate, providing ample flow of water, in reasonable condition and intact (Where replacements are required taps are to be upgraded in the main to 3" lever taps unless there is some sort of medical adaptation)

WASHING MACHINE FITTINGS

- All properties which have the facilities for a washing machine MUST have isolator valves fitted to hot and cold supply pipes, and a new sealed waste cone should also be in place.

WINDOWS

- Windows must be operating properly, checked for safety, wind and watertight with appropriate locks, handles and restrictor mechanisms. Keys (where applicable must be provided for the incoming tenant)
- Internal cills must be in sound condition.
- Where double glazed units have condensation between panes, the affected unit will be replaced.

INTERNAL DOORS

- All pass doors are to be intact, operating correctly, fitting properly with appropriate ironmongery and timber finishes.
- Doors should only need to be replaced when non-standard, damage is extensive, ill-fitting beyond repair, or where a fire door is required.
- Fire doors should comply with the regulations in force at the time of installation. (Kitchens and living rooms in flats above GF; all rooms in houses above two storeys)

EXTERNAL DOORS

- All installed locks to be working correctly, with a full set of keys available. Doors to be secure and weatherproof. Letter plates should be installed in front doors
- The need for draught-proofing should be investigated at the time of the void, if needed this should be installed as part of void repairs.

FLOORS

- All floorboards to be made safe, secure and free from excessive noise and where possible level. Location of pipe runs shall be considered where known.
- All laminate flooring to be removed in upper flatted dwellings. Laminate flooring can be left in ground floor housing only if in good condition.

SKIRTING & FACINGS

- Missing or badly damaged skirting/ facings should be replaced or repaired as necessary.

CUPBOARDS

- All bedroom cupboards should have 1 plywood edged shelf with a hanging rail installed with additional support if necessary
- Slatted shelving should be installed within cylinder or boiler cupboards above the cylinder/boiler depending on the space available within
- Within hall or kitchen cupboards, plywood edged shelving should be installed depending on the space available

KITCHEN UNITS

- All units to be checked to ensure they are fit for purpose, strong enough to take the loading, free from any major damage, (e.g. water damage in sink base units) and are correctly secured to the wall.
- Doors should line up adequately, damaged doors/drawers to be replaced with matching or close matching doors wherever possible. If not possible then new doors should be installed.
- There should be at least 1 shelf per base unit (including sink units) and 1 or 2 shelves per wall unit.
- Damaged worktops to be replaced with matching where possible. Where it is not possible to match worktops then all worktops should be replaced where practical e.g. where a roll top sink unit is installed.

- Where matching of doors/worktops is not possible then replacements should be as near a match as possible. However, if a kitchen is in poor condition and the property may be seen as difficult to let then consideration will be given to replacing the entire kitchen.

MEDICAL ADAPTATIONS

- Every adaptation should be checked to ensure they are operational and meet the needs of the incoming tenant. If not, small installations such as grab rails and handrails should be removed with holes etc. being refilled.
- Where there is a level access shower, every effort must be made to let house to a family requiring such a shower. Level access showers will **not** be removed.
- Stair lifts will be removed completely by the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) as a health and safety measure unless an incoming tenant requires the facility.
- Temporary ramps to be removed.

BATHROOMS

- Bathroom suites including tiled surrounds to be checked for chips, cracks etc. and where possible repaired. Where a replacement unit is required, the colour should match remaining parts of suite. If unavailable and all units are in poor condition then an entire white suite should be fitted, otherwise individual units should be replaced in white.

CEILINGS

- Ceilings to be left in good condition, tapes replaced or patched, Artex patched, polystyrene tiles or coves removed, and ceilings made good.

DECORATION

- Decoration will be carried out up to a maximum of 2 rooms and / or a decoration voucher given. This will be based on the condition of the property and with the agreement of the prospective tenant.

- In exceptional cases, where a property has been identified as being in an extremely poor state of decoration, an additional decoration voucher may be approved by a Senior Manager.