



## **VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY**

### **1.0 Objectives**

The objectives of our Void Management Policy are to:

- Comply with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Social Housing Charter Outcomes relating to Void Management
- Implement best practice in void management as applicable to the Association's housing stock and relevant to our area of operations.
- Ensure the close co-operation between housing and property services that is required for effective void management
- Minimise rent loss and average relet time for void property, as determined by comparison with our year-on year performance and the performance of other, comparable, social landlords.
- Achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction with the condition of properties at the beginning of tenancy and with the void management process overall
- Provide properties that are safe and attractive to applicants at the time of offer
- Create sustainable tenancies
- Assist in the achievement of objectives as set out in the Association's Corporate Management Plans and Departmental Service Plans
- Minimise and control strategic and operational risks to which the Association is exposed
- Set out a system of monitoring and performance management that enable management and Committee oversight without creating any unnecessary burden of administration.

### **2.0 Definition of a Void Property**

A void property may arise through the

- Termination of a tenancy as set out in the Scottish Secure (or Short Secure) tenancy agreement.
- Transfer of an Ochil View Housing Association tenant to another Ochil View Housing Association property
- Abandonment
- Death of a tenant with no successor
- Eviction

The Association requires 28 days notice of a tenant's intention to terminate their tenancy. However we will not receive notice from tenants where termination of tenancy arises through transfer, abandonment, eviction or death.

We will make tenants aware of their responsibilities at end of tenancy in a number of ways, including

- The tenancy agreement
- The tenant's handbook

- The termination of tenancy letter sent in response to notice being given

### **3.0 Compliance with The Scottish Housing Regulator's Social Housing Charter Outcomes in relation to Void Management**

We will comply with the Social Housing Regulator's Social Housing Charter Outcomes in relation to Void Management as follows:

#### **Social Housing Charter Outcome 4: Quality of housing**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.

We will also comply with the following Charter Outcomes that will indirectly affect our performance in relation to Void Management, as follows:

#### **Social Housing Charter Outcome 1: Equalities**

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

#### **Social Housing Charter Outcome 2: Communication**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

#### **Social Housing Charter Outcome 5: Repairs, maintenance and improvements**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

#### **Social Housing Charter Outcome 6: Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes**

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.

#### **Social Housing Charter Outcome 13: Value for money**

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

### **3.0 Best Practice in Void Management**

The Association will:

- Meet our legal, regulatory and contractual obligations in relation to Void Management
- Meet tenant's expectations of the condition of the property at relet
- Efficiently complete all repairs necessary to bring the property to a lettable standard
- Meet our commitments in terms of environmental sustainability
- Keep prospective tenants informed throughout the Void Management Process
- Minimise the length of time and rent loss while properties are void
- Include measures to establish a sustainable tenancy during Void Management

### **4.0 Co-operation between housing and property services**

The main responsibility for exchanging information on a day-to-day basis remains with housing and property services staff, who must continually be aware of the need to inform colleagues of relevant matters in void management

Housing Services will inform Property Services immediately that a notification of a termination of tenancy is received, or when a property is expected to become void for any other reason.

Properties will be secured only where expressly considered to be necessary to prevent vandalism or damage between tenancies

Property services will advise housing immediately that repairs are completed in order that the sign-up interview can be completed and the tenancy let.

The void management policy will feature in the induction of all members of staff in Property and Housing Services. Changes to the policy will be briefed to all members of these departments, and to staff returning after maternity leave or long term absence.

Where new developments are completed from site, there will clearly be no pre-void repair period although the date of practical completion will be the date at which the property is available for let. Housing Services staff should liaise with Development Services staff to ensure a prompt letting of new property when available, as set out in the Handover of new property procedure.

### **5.0 Minimisation of rent loss**

We aim to maximise the availability of houses by the period that properties are vacant between tenancies. Housing Services are primarily responsible for liaison with outgoing and incoming tenants. Property Services are responsible for liaison with contractors and the efficient completion of pre-tenancy repairs

The primary responsibility for leading the tenant liaison process lies with the housing officer with responsibility for the development in which the void is located. The primary responsibility for leading the pre-tenancy repair process lies with the Development and Property Services Manager. Operational oversight of the voids management process lies with the Assistant

Housing Services Manager and Assistant Maintenance Officer, who meet regularly to discuss void management issues.

We aim to allocate properties as soon as possible after notice of termination is received. Where an opportunity arises to commence void management procedures before the termination of tenancy, for example where keys are returned early, we will make best use of this.

We require departing tenants to return keys to our office not later than 12:00pm on the date of termination of the tenancy. Late return (after 12:00pm) will result in a further day's rent charge. We will charge any new tenant rent from the date their tenancy begins. We will begin and end tenancies on any calendar day.

We aim to complete post-termination inspections of properties within one working day of the return of keys to the office.

We aim to issue repairs instructions within one working day of the inspection of the property.

In addition to the above, we have set out targets for a range of key stages of the void management process, as set out in the Void Management and Inspection Process.

We will set demanding response times for our contractors who carry out void repairs and monitor their compliance with these.

Where units are deemed hard to let following multiple refusals or anticipated difficulty in lettings, the Assistant Housing Services Manager will notify the Housing Services Manager and an appropriate letting strategy will be developed for properties affected.

The Assistant Housing Services Manager will report monthly on any properties removed from the letting stock for major repairs, special projects and exercises. The Housing Services Manager will review this with Management Team colleagues if satisfactory progress is not made towards returning these to the letting stock.

## **6.0 Achieving tenant satisfaction**

We have set out a minimum "Lettable Standard" stating the condition in which properties will be brought prior to beginning a tenancy. The Lettable Standard includes all work that must be done to meet statutory requirements, and houses will always be safe, secure, wind and watertight prior to letting. We will ask the tenant to confirm that the property is at this lettable standard at let. This minimum standard may be exceeded where necessary to let the property but may not include all repairs, where the efficiencies of the letting process permit the property to be let with repairs to be completed when the property is occupied.

Where properties are let with repairs outstanding or with works of improvement imminent, we will advise the tenant of the nature of these works and the timetable for completion.

We will pay an allowance towards the costs of basic decoration where the decorative condition of property requires it. The level of allowances will be reviewed annually and the arrangements for payment are set out in the Customer Payment Policy.

We will survey tenant satisfaction with the void management process as part of the New Tenancy Visit.

## **7.0 Sustainable tenancies**

We aim to achieve sustainable tenancies, in order to contribute to sustainable communities. We aim to minimise refusals of offers or tenancy, and provide full pre-offer information about the type of property in our property adverts

All new tenants will be offered an Income Maximisation interview, and fuel advice

We will carry out new tenancy visits; follow up visits and onward referrals to appropriate advice agencies where necessary

We will provide basic furniture to new tenants who need it.

## **8.0 Corporate objectives and Control of Risks**

Properly managed Void Management processes are considered to assist in minimising the following risks:

Efficient and effective Void Management is considered to contribute to the following Risk Controls

- Failure to properly maintain properties
- Failure to Comply with Corporate Sustainability & Environmental Objectives
- Violence/ Injury to Staff and/or Tenants
- Damage to properties from tenant alterations
- Inability to let properties due to insufficient need or demand
- Loss of Rent through Voids
- Reputational risk

Efficient Void Management is considered to contribute to achievement of the following Association Strategic and Departmental Objectives

- To provide a comprehensive and responsive housing management service to the Association's tenants, sharing and factored owners (SO1);
- To provide a comprehensive and responsive property management service to the Association's tenants, including a cost effective factoring service to sharing owners and owner-occupiers ensuring compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. (SO2);
- To provide a quality management service to tenants and customers (HM1);
- To achieve consistently high levels of customer satisfaction from the delivery of housing services (HM4);
- To work with customers, local groups and partners to develop accessible and inclusive services which assist tenants to sustain their tenancies and live independently in their homes. (HM5)
- To maximise the level of income generated by our housing stock and minimise rent arrears by sensitive and supportive interventions with tenants. (HM6)
- To provide a quality reactive and planned maintenance service to tenants and customers (PM1);
- To ensure that the Associations resources are used efficiently (FM2);

## **9.0 Monitoring and Performance Management.**

The Association will set targets for, maintain records on, report to our Management Committee, our tenants and the Scottish Housing Regulator our performance in relation to the following Charter Indicators that are directly related to our performance in terms of Void Management:

- Indicator 9: Percentage of tenants satisfied with the standard of their home when moving in.
- Indicator 18: Percentage of tenancy offers refused during the year.
- Indicator 34: Percentage of rent due lost through properties being empty during the last year.
- Indicator 35: Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year.

And also the following indicators which are **indirectly** related to Void Management:

- Indicator 1: Percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by their landlord.
- Indicator 3: Percentage of tenants who feel their landlord is good at keeping them informed about their services and decisions.
- Indicator 4: Percentage of 1st and 2nd stage complaints, including those related to equalities issues, responded to in full in the last year, that were resolved by the landlord and also the percentage upheld.
- Indicator 5: Percentage of 1st and 2nd stage complaints responded to in full in the last year, within the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Model Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) timescales.
- Indicator 10: Percentage of existing tenants satisfied with the quality of their home.
- Indicator 13: Percentage of reactive repairs carried out in the last year completed right first time.
- Indicator 14: Percentage of repairs appointments kept.
- Indicator 17: Percentage of tenants satisfied with the management of the neighbourhood they live in.
- Indicator 20: Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year.
- Indicator 29: Percentage of tenants who feel that the rent for their property represents good value for money.

and

The structure of reports may vary to enable current and relevant issues to be highlighted. Our targets will be set with reference to our current performance; the performance of other, comparable RSL's, and we aim for continuous improvement in this area or work.

## **10.0 General**

This Policy requires to be read in conjunction with:

- Void Property and Inspection Procedures.
- Void Process
- House inspection form at change of tenancy
- Non-entitled spouse consent form
- Customer Payment Policy
- Arrangement for dealing with a death arising during a tenancy
- Abandonment process

- Standard letters and forms (Void Management)
- Rent arrears Policy
- Recharge Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Nomination and Section 5 protocol agreements with Fife and Clackmannanshire Council
- Tenants exit interview form
- Quarterly report to Management Committee
- The Reactive Maintenance Policy
- Procedure for the handover of new property from development.
- New Tenant Interview Form
- Lettable standard

## **11.0 Policy Review**

This policy will be subject to review every 5 years. Procedures related to the implementation of this Policy will be amended as required.

### **Policy Review Process and Consultation**

Reviewed by Involved Residents Group on  
 Reviewed by the Management Team on  
 Considered by Housing Services Committee

17<sup>th</sup> April 2013  
 5<sup>th</sup> February 2013  
 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013

**APPROVED BY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ON**