

TOPIC: Void Management Policy

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THE PURPOSE

To set out Shettleston Housing Association's approach to the management of void properties, to minimise void loss and accelerate void turnaround.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Shettleston Housing Association (SHA) operates in accordance with;

- Statutory requirements,
- The standards set down in the Scottish Social Housing Charter,
- The requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator,

in the formulation and implementation of all its policies. SHA seeks to fulfil its Corporate Aims through the development and implementation of its policies and all SHA's policies operate to achieve its Strategic Objectives as set out in its Business Plan.

2. EQUALITIES

SHA is committed to providing equality of opportunity to all persons or groups within its area of operations in every aspect of its activities. In operating this policy SHA will endeavor to ensure equality of opportunity for all, at all times, and in all circumstances. In line with this commitment to equality this policy, and any summary or information leaflet, can be made available, free of charge, in a variety of formats including; large print, translation into another language, braille or, audio tape.

3. ACCESS TO POLICY INFORMATION

SHA will ensure that its policies are made fully available to all tenants, applicants, members, persons or groups within its areas. Every effort will be made by SHA to support access and promote awareness of its policies by posting these on its website, developing summaries, guidance and information leaflets as appropriate.

4. TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION

SHA is committed to meet the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 in all of its policies and to meet the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. SHA will involve tenants in the development of its policies and seek feedback in appropriate circumstances. It will ensure that any material change to services affecting tenants in this and other policies will be the subject of consultation.

5. POLICY MONITORING

SHA is committed to ensure that adequate monitoring of the implementation of its policies is undertaken. This will be achieved through regular review by the Management Committee, customer/tenant feedback surveys, and regular consultation with tenant/resident groups.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

SHA has a detailed Risk Management Policy in place and it will assess the risks to the Association in the implementation of each of its policies as part of its risk management strategy.

7. PROCEDURES

SHA will develop a detailed set of procedures identifying actions, roles and responsibilities in the implementation its policies. These procedures will be subject to regular review and audit.

8. TRAINING

SHA will ensure that its staff are properly trained in terms of their knowledge and understanding of statutory requirements and the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter pertaining to its policies. It will ensure that appropriate staff are kept up to date with all procedures pertaining to the implementation of policies. The Management Committee will have access to training to ensure that it can maintain appropriate control and overview of the policy and procedures.

9. POLICY OVERVIEW

This Void Management Policy and associated procedures is the Association's approach to the management of housing properties from pre-termination stage to the re-letting of the property to a new tenant.

A property is classed as void when the existing tenant has ended their tenancy and moved out of the property. The void period is the time between the date of the termination of a previous tenancy and the start of a new tenancy.

Successful management of void properties is crucial to the business of the Association in terms of minimising lost rental income and accelerating void turnaround.

10. PURPOSE OF POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to set out the Association's position on the management of voids.

- To ensure we manage the process of repairing and re-letting void properties in the minimum amount of time and to an acceptable standard of repair.
- To ensure the availability of our housing stock is maximised to meet the demand from housing applicants and to allocate our properties to match their needs and circumstances in relation to size and design.

- To ensure appropriate repairs to void properties are carried out to satisfy contractual and legal obligations and to achieve the Association's lettable standard.
- To ensure where appropriate and where it is more cost effective to the Association, a decoration allowance is given to incoming tenants to allow them to decorate the property to their taste. Inspections will be carried out to ensure the work has been carried out by the new tenant and to an acceptable standard.
- To ensure outgoing tenants' responsibilities are identified and if appropriate in the circumstances, the Association raises recharge repairs with the outgoing tenant for any work identified as their responsibility which had not been carried out to a satisfactory standard.
- To seek to achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction with the condition of properties at beginning of tenancy and with the void management process overall.
- To create sustainable tenancies.
- To ensure close co-operation between the customer & community services team, property services and finance team that is required for effective void management.

11. AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Our aims and objectives will include:

- being efficient and proactive in fulfilling our legal obligations as a landlord;
- ensuring that tenants' fulfil their legal obligations in relation to their tenancy agreement;
- accelerating void turnaround;
- minimising void rent loss;
- identifying low demand stock and developing appropriate local initiatives;
- ensuring that staff are appropriately trained so that they have the appropriate skills to deal with issues that arise;
- ensuring management of the void process is efficient and effective with appropriate records and IT systems being maintained;
- ensuring monitoring and reviewing void management processes and intervene as appropriate;
- ensuring properties are well maintained, safe, secure and in line with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS);
- ensuring properties are warm, insulated, fuel efficient and compliant with the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH);
- optimising customer satisfaction with service delivery; and
- delivering value for money.

12. REGULATORY & LEGAL COMPLIANCE

In terms of the Scottish Social Charter, the Scottish Housing Regulator has identified a number of key indicators relevant to void management by which it will measure landlord performance, including the following;

- **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.

- **Outcome 4: Quality of Housing**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) when they are allocated; are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair; and also meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) by December 2020.

- **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.

- **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, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

- **Outcome 11 - Tenancy Sustainment**

Social landlords ensure that:

tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

- **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.

In implementing this void management policy we will comply with relevant legislation and associated regulations, including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, 2001, 2010 & 2014
- The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Scottish Secure Tenants (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 2002

Our tenancy agreement underpins the roles and responsibilities of both landlord and tenant when a property is to be vacated (e.g. giving notice, leaving the house in a reasonable condition etc.). It is a condition of the Scottish Secure and Short Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreements used by the Association that all properties should be wind and watertight, safe and secure, which also applies to void properties.

Our Void Management Policy is consistent and related to the following:

- Void Management Procedures
- Allocations Policy
- Abandonment Procedures
- Tenancy Sustainment Policy
- Gas safety Policy
- Minimum Standards in House Conditions
- Maintenance Policy & associated procedures
- Business Plan

13. DEFINITION OF A VOID

The Association will deem a house void in the following circumstances:

- Where a tenant has formally terminated the tenancy by written notice.
- On the death of a tenant where there is no successor in accordance with the Association's Succession to Tenancy Policy.
- By Abandonment of a tenant, where the appropriate legal notices have been served in accordance with the Abandonment Procedures
- By eviction where the Association has completed the relevant court action.
- Following the handover of a new scheme where the house has been completed but has not been allocated.
- Following the handover of a property that has previously been used as a Decant.
- Where the Association has agreed to purchase an ownership share of a Shared Ownership property with vacant possession in order to re-let the property for social rent.
- Where the Association has acquired property with vacant possession via the Glasgow City Council Acquisition strategy to re-let the property for social rent.

14. VOID MANAGEMENT PROCESS

14.1 Key Stages

- Notification of intention to end tenancy
- Pre-termination arrangements
- End of Tenancy
- Void repairs
- Selection and allocation

14.1.1 Notification End of Tenancy

Tenants are required to give 28 days' notice that they are intending to end their tenancy. Our void management process commences as soon as we get notice of a vacant property and receive a written tenancy termination. This notice period will apply unless there are extenuating circumstances which would require an urgent termination of tenancy. Any reduction in the notice period requires the approval of the Housing Manager or Senior Housing Officer.

We will not receive notice from tenants where termination of tenancy arises through transfer. The tenant will have 7 calendar days to move out of their former tenancy during which time no rent charge will be made.

However, where a tenant takes longer than 7 days to move, the Association will make a charge for loss of rent for each day's rent lost to the Association beyond these days. The additional rent will either be taken from an existing rent balance credit or the additional rent will be required to be paid in advance of transfer. If the tenant is eligible for Housing Benefit and has additional needs which prevents moving quickly the Association will assist (if applicable) to apply for housing benefit on two homes, however, we acknowledge eligibility criteria for this benefit is restrictive.

Any monies outstanding in terms of rechargeable repairs will also need to be paid in full prior to transfer.

All these conditions will apply unless there are extenuating circumstances where this would not be appropriate.

In the event of the death of a tenant (and no one is entitled to succeed to the tenancy) the termination date will be the date on which keys are received.

There will be circumstances where we do not receive notice such as where the property has been abandoned by the former tenant or where the former tenant has been evicted. In these cases our aim will be to have the keys returned or have locks changed as quickly as practically possible so that the property can be re-let without undue delay.

14.1.2 Pre-termination Arrangements

At the point of receiving notification of end of tenancy the Association will carry out an exit interview with the tenant including agreeing end of tenancy date, identifying any outstanding rent, obtaining a forwarding address and arranging for a pre-termination inspection of property to be carried out.

The pre-termination inspection allows us to inspect the condition of the property as well as provide advice to the outgoing tenant. This will include confirming when keys are to be handed in, requirements in relation to repair obligations, house clearance, arrangements for meter readings, any right to compensation for certain improvement works that they have carried out during their tenancy with the Association's consent and any rechargeable repairs which may be due. We expect the outgoing tenant to leave their property cleared, cleaned and in good condition and a follow up inspection will be carried out with the outgoing tenant prior to keys being returned to the Association.

14.1.3 End of Tenancy

Once a tenancy has been ended, we will:

- update our tenancy records and property records;
- arrange for the void property to be inspected and necessary repairs instructed;
- identify and pursue any former tenant arrears, rechargeable repairs, etc.;
- allocate the property.

14.1.4 Void Repairs

We will inspect all our empty properties to assess condition, suitability for reletting and instruct any essential repairs.

The Association will have a minimum standard for letting its properties (see Appendix 1), below which no property will be relet. A decoration allowance will be given to cover the cost of basic decoration where the decorative condition of the property requires it. This sum will not be paid to the new tenant until the Tenancy Agreement has been signed.

If, however, a decoration allowance is not deemed appropriate due to the level of decoration required we will redecorate a property to a basic standard (either in whole or in part, as required).

Planned programme renewals will generally be carried out when the property is occupied to coincide with the approved investment timetable in accordance with the Association's planned maintenance programme. However, in certain circumstances it may be more expedient to carry out planned programme renewals when a property is void – there is discretion to do so where it is financially viable and where this has been agreed by the Maintenance Manager and Director of Property Services.

The void turnaround targets for repair completion agreed between the Association and our subsidiary contractor who is responsible for void work completion is:

- Four days for standard works.
- Seven days for standard works and additional repairs.
- Fifteen days for standard works and major repairs including component replacement.
- Properties that require major works such as rot repairs and structural repairs will be excluded from these targets.

14.1.5 Selection & Allocation

We will commence the allocation process as soon as we have formal notification of a void property. The selection of potential applicant will be carried out strictly in accordance with our Allocations policy.

Where possible we will pre-allocate void properties. Where we have identified an interested applicant, we will notify them as soon as the keys are available for viewing. In all cases accompanied viewings will be carried out.

Where an offer of tenancy is accepted, a Tenancy Agreement will be signed. As well as the date of entry, this will include details of tenant and landlord responsibilities. We will provide tenancy advice for new tenants and seek to answer queries at the point of tenancy sign up. A settling in visit will be carried out normally within 6 weeks of tenancy start date. We will also seek feedback from new tenants on the satisfaction of the void service in order to improve service delivery. All new tenants will be invited to complete a new tenant survey questionnaire.

14.1.6 Communication

The responsibility of the repair, management and allocation of void properties involves the property services, housing management, allocations staff and also the staff at our subsidiary company Upkeep who carry out the void repairs. It is essential that staff keep each other informed of progress throughout the void period to ensure the aims of the policy are achieved. In order to achieve this a set of written internal procedures for all staff involved in the void management process is attached (Appendix - TBC). These procedures have been drawn up in consultation with staff as approved by Committee. The procedures identify the various steps involved in void management and identify section responsibilities where appropriate.

15. SUSTAINABILITY

- 15.1** Preventative action to minimise the number of void properties is essential in achieving sustainable communities. Affordability of rents, value for money and long-term demand will be considered in all aspects of the housing management service to ensure Shettleston's commitment to sustainable communities is achieved.
- 15.2** A range of other complementary policies and procedures can contribute to enabling tenants to remain in their own homes. This Policy therefore require to be implemented in the context of other policies, including:
- Allocations Policy, which aims to match applicants with properties, which will suit their current and future needs, in order to reduce turnover.
 - Tenancy Sustainment Policy, which aims to minimise tenancy breakdown through abandonment, eviction or early end of tenancy and to work with tenants to help them live independently on their own with appropriate support and work in partnership with other agencies to assist tenants in sustaining their tenancies.
 - Estate Management Policy, which aims to ensure that the tenancies and environment are managed and maintained to a high standard.
 - The Rent Arrears Policy, which aims to resolve arrears problems in order to reduce the number of evictions.
 - Mutual exchanges of properties within the Association's stock or with other RSLs are encouraged.
 - Maintenance Policy, which aims to ensure that properties are maintained to a high standard.
 - The Rent Policy, which aims to address issues of affordability.
 - The Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, which aims to resolve neighbour disputes and wider anti-social problems within a development.
 - Abandonment Procedure, which ensures that any abandoned properties are quickly identified.
- 15.3** Where a property has become void, it is essential that the amount of time it is vacant be minimised. We will seek to achieve this by ensuring the following:
- Housing Lists are kept up to date and regularly reviewed.

- Notice periods at the end of a tenancy are enforced.
- Properties are pre-allocated before the outgoing tenancy has ended where possible.
- The allocation process has a time limit for applicants responding to an offer and viewing a property.
- Any household items left in the properties will where possible be recycled by our subsidiary company, Upkeep. These items will then be offered for sale to support our tenants and community and to avoid landfill.

16. MONITORING AND REPORTING

The Housing Manager and Housing Support Manager are responsible for keys aspects in implementing this policy including termination of tenancies and allocation of voids. The Maintenance Manager is responsible for overseeing key aspects of repairing obligations within voids. Specific tasks within the void management process are delegated to appropriate staff.

In order to monitor the effectiveness of this policy, Key Performance targets (Annex 1) will be used to measure void management outcomes. We will routinely review and analyse the outcomes and make recommendations where changes are required.

The Committee will receive regular updates on the implementation of the Void Management Policy so they can have reasonable assurance that it is operating effectively in practice.

17. COMPLAINTS

Any tenant or former tenant who feels aggrieved by the service they have received from staff in carrying out their responsibilities in relation to this policy and its associated procedures can make a complaint to the Association.

All complaints will be fully investigated in accordance with the Association's Complaints Policy. Information on making a complaint is readily available on request at our office or on our website.

18. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless an earlier review is required due to legislative changes.

Annex 1**SHETTLESTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION****VOID MANAGEMENT – KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Key Performance Indicators	Target
Total rent loss from all voids as a % of gross rent due	0.9%
Proportion of lets to homeless referrals	25%
Re-let period calendar days	18 days
Void repair timescales	
Cat 1 – 4 days	95%
Cat 2 – 7 days	95%
Cat 3 – 15 days	100%
New tenant satisfaction	95%
Monitor abandonments	≤20 per annum
Stock turnover	≤ 10% of <i>total stock</i> (budget allowance 250 void instances)

***These targets will be reviewed & updated on an annual basis as agreed by Committee.**