



VOIDS MANAGEMENT POLICY & PROCEDURES

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VOIDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

AIMS

Castlehill Housing Association (CHA) aims to ensure that properties which become void are re-let as quickly and efficiently as possible, with due regard to the needs of outgoing and incoming tenants and the need to maintain our properties to the agreed lettings standard.

The policy operates within the legal framework provided by the Housing (Scotland) Act, 2001 and other relevant legislation such as the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. The policy aims to enable compliance with the Scottish Housing Charter 2017:

- Outcome 4: Quality of Housing
- Outcome 13: Value for money

Outcome 4 states that:

Social landlords manage their business so that: tenant's 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.

This standard covers what landlords should be achieving in all their properties.

Outcome 13 states that:

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

This standard covers the efficient and effective management of services and specifically refers to minimising the time houses are empty.

DEFINITIONS

A "void" is a property for which there is a current rent account, but for which no current tenancy exists. In line with SHR guidelines the "void period" is the period which commences the first day there is no rent debit and ends on the day before a new rent debit is raised.

OBJECTIVES

- To minimise void rental loss, void periods and void repair costs through effective coordination of Housing Management and Maintenance operations to re-let properties within agreed target times.
- Ensure effective, efficient and accountable management of properties.
- Enable effective monitoring and reporting of void management and service delivery.
- Ensure that tenants are aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to ending the tenancy e.g requirement to give 28 days notice, to return all keys timeously and to fully clear the property and leave it in a clean condition.

- Ensure that repairs to properties are undertaken to enable CHA to re-let to the lettings standard (see appendix 1) and that where appropriate “rechargeable” repair costs are met by the outgoing tenant or pursued post termination.
- Make effective use of void periods to carry out upgrading or major repairs as appropriate and to co-ordinate with the major repairs programme with regard to decant requirements.
- Prevent end of tenancy arrears wherever possible.
- Ensure incoming tenants are given all required information, documentation and advice to allow them to move into the property promptly at the agreed commencement of tenancy date.
- Achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction with the condition of properties at the beginning of the tenancy.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Operation of the Voids Policy will be reported to the Housing & Property Services Committee on a quarterly basis. Details of procedures for gathering information and recording each stage of void processing are given at Section 2.8 and this information will be used to provide the following performance monitoring indicators:

- Average re-let times for all voids including breakdown into sheltered and general needs housing.
- Details of all long-term voids including “difficult to let” properties or voids with no applicants for re-housing
- Actual numbers of voids (terminated and re-let).
- Vacancies as a % of total stock.
- Cumulative rent loss through voids (£ and as a % of annual rent).
- Actions taken to reduce voids in difficult to let properties.
- Offer refusal rates and reasons

In addition to quarterly reporting, periodic benchmarking information i.e. comparison with peer group RSLs, will be provided as available using data collected from the ARC.

SETTING TARGETS

CHA recognises the importance of working to specific timescales in dealing with voids as part of performance monitoring and ongoing review of operations.

The targets are as follows:

General Needs/Amenity: 15 days*

Supported Housing: 25 days*

*calendar days

It is important to note that the above targets are the maximum timeframe, staff should always be working towards minimising the number of void days.

VOIDS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

TERMINATION OF TENANCY

CHA provides details of tenant's responsibilities regarding giving up their tenancy via the Tenants Handbook and in the Tenancy Agreement itself e.g tenants are required to give 28 days written notice.

On being contacted by a tenant wishing to give up a tenancy, Housing Services will firstly log the intended termination on QL. This form can also be used where the termination is, as a result of the tenant's death. When the form is returned to CHA the logging of receipt of the form will generate a system generated acknowledgement letter to the tenant. This will be done within 3 working days. At this point an email is also sent to the Housing Officer to advise that the termination has been received and what date the tenancy should end. In most circumstances, this will be 28 days from when the form is received. Where the void has arisen, as a result of the death of the tenant, the tenancy legally ends on the date of death. The logging of the receipt of the termination form also sends both an email and workflow to the Property Services Officer to advise of the termination and to request that the Property Services Officer schedules a pre-termination inspection within the next 7 days where possible.

The Housing Services staff will record the tentative end date against the rent account which will also start the void recording process on QL. The termination acknowledgement letter is sent out with a copy of our termination information leaflet. The information sent out includes a copy of our lettings standard so tenants/family are clear about the standard we expect the property to be returned to us in. A copy of the recharges leaflet is also sent out at this point to ensure that tenants/family are clear when we will recharge and how this process works. This information is also available from Sheltered Housing Scheme staff (Aberdeenshire & Moray) where requested. There are 2 standard termination letters depending on whether the tenant is eligible for housing benefit or not. Where possible we will calculate the rent due to the end of the tenancy along with instructions for payment of the balance due.

Should a tenant write initially giving notice, the 28 days will be calculated from the date of receipt of this letter. The formal Termination Form and end of tenancy information will still be sent out to ensure that the outgoing tenant receives appropriate advice and returns contact details to arrange the maintenance inspection.

Each week, Housing Officers and Property Services Officers along with the relevant managers will meet to discuss progress on each current void and to note upcoming voids.

RETURN OF KEYS

For all general needs stock, keys should be returned to CHA's office at 4 Carden Place, Aberdeen. Housing Officers will check keys on receipt and take appropriate action should all keys issued not be returned. The Housing Officer will complete a key's return form. A copy will be passed to property

services with the keys for recording and storage and to the Administrative Officer to confirm the termination of tenancy date and authorise the termination of the rent account.

The rent account for the outgoing tenant will be terminated on QL on the date that the keys are returned. This ends the outgoing tenants rent obligation and starts the void accrual period from the following day. This action will be completed by Housing Services Admin.

In the case of sheltered housing, keys are returned to the Scheme Manager and they will telephone/email the Housing Services Admin to confirm the date of return. The Administrative Assistant will be responsible for advising the maintenance section and Administrative Officer of the return of keys and confirmation of the termination dates. Procedures for issue and return of keys by scheme based staff are outlined on Sharepoint.

Should keys not be returned on, or before, the previously agreed termination date, rent will continue to be charged on the property until the keys are received.

If the property has been vacated but no keys are returned within 3 calendar days of the agreed termination date the Senior Housing Services Officer or Housing Services Manager may authorise a lock change and the costs of this will be recharged to the outgoing tenant.

ORGANISATION OF REPAIR WORKS

During the notice period, the Property Services Officer will organise a property inspection. The inspection records the condition of the property, notes property characteristics and records any work to be completed before re-letting. Often during this period when the tenant is in the process of moving, it is difficult to fully assess works required to the tenancy and in these circumstances, the Property Services Officers would re visit the property when the keys have been returned to complete a full inspection.

Information and costs about any recharges will be sent to the outgoing tenant by letter or email.

Where possible, and with the tenant's agreement, repair works may be carried out within the notice period to help reduce time required for works when the property is vacated.

Where minor repair works only are needed and these works cannot be carried out during the notice period, the Property Services Officer, may arrange for works to be done after an incoming tenant has moved in. This will only be done if works are not urgent or disruptive and the appropriate Housing Officer will be advised by the Property Services Officer in order that the incoming tenant can be informed.

Where there are repairs or decoration works which require to be done while the property is empty, the Property Services Officer will seek to ensure that works are carried out on a clearly specified timescale with the Contractor to enable agreed performance targets to be met. During this period, an EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) assessment will be completed.

If a property is assessed as requiring decoration, an allowance or decoration pack may be provided to the incoming tenant to assist with this work or decoration may be carried out by CHA should the decorative condition of the property be likely to make it difficult to let.

PLANNED MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADING

Properties scheduled for planned maintenance or upgrading are identified in the annual programme. To keep disruption to existing tenants to a minimum, works will be carried out if a property becomes vacant wherever this is possible and practical within the agreed programme.

Property Services Officers will liaise with the Property Services Manager when an applicable property is due to become vacant and thereafter it will become the responsibility of the Clerk of Works to ensure that works proceed as quickly as possible to keep the void period to a minimum.

Where a void property is to be used as decant accommodation in relation to the planned maintenance programme the Property Services Manager will be responsible for ensuring that the decant period is minimised. Where a property is used for decant, or for a contractors base during major works, the void will be calculated only for days where the property was available for let and the Property Services Team will be responsible for covering the rent during this period.

All upgrading works undertaken in the void period will be carried out in accordance with the Associations' Planned Maintenance Policy.

PROPERTY RE-LETS

In line with CHA's Allocation Policy and operation of the HomehuntNES choice based letting scheme, steps to identify prospective tenants should commence as soon as the void or prospective void is advised to Housing Management staff. Each step in the process of allocating a void will be recorded on the QL voids package.

Whilst CHA is mindful of minimising rent loss, there is an equal obligation to ensure that our housing is let to those most in need and as a result, all applicants (where possible) who are being considered for allocation will be visited at home by a Housing Officer to ensure that the circumstances which have led to their priority award are correct.

CHA staff will carry out accompanied viewings unless there are specific unavoidable circumstances where this is not possible. Viewing can be carried out by Housing Officers or Sheltered Scheme Managers as appropriate.

Where possible, with the prior written agreement of the outgoing tenant, viewings may take place within the 28 days Notice period. If a viewing takes place when properties are empty, staff will ensure that all Health & Safety matters have been attended to and that the property is in a suitable condition to be viewed safely e.g required repairs to flooring or electrical fittings completed. Before a viewing is completed within the void period, the Housing Officer will liaise with the Property Services Officer to ensure that the property is ready to be viewed and to be made aware of any outstanding works or health and safety issues.

Offers of tenancy letters will require the applicant to confirm their decision on accepting the tenancy no more than 3 calendar days after viewing takes place. Housing Management staff will seek to ensure that the time between acceptance of an offer and the Start of Tenancy date is kept to the minimum possible taking into account the circumstances of the incoming tenant.

PROPERTIES FOR WHICH THERE ARE NO APPLICANTS

CHA recognises that there are some properties e.g rural sheltered or urban studio apartments, which may experience periods where there are no applicants waiting to be re-housed.

The Director of Housing and Property Services is responsible for ensuring that all practical steps are taken to attract prospective tenants for these properties. Such actions may include the following:

- Advertising locally and on a wider scale.
- Maximise use of promotion through CHA's Website.
- Promotion of awareness through Local Authorities, health services, RSL's and other partner organisations.
- Incentive schemes for prospective tenants.
- Investigating possible upgrades to properties where appropriate.
- Consideration of change of use, role or client group – subject to Committee Approval and local tenant consultation. The Director will take account of any impact of Housing Support funding in changes of use.
- Participation of local tenants in initiatives to promote schemes.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS – FIRST LETS

Housing and Property Services staff will ensure effective liaison over the handover process for new properties with the aim of achieving occupancy as soon as practically possible.

Reporting on new lets' will be made to the Housing and Property Services Sub-Committee as new developments are completed.

VOID PROCESSING – INFORMATION AND AUDIT

Processing of void properties within CHA involves a number of different staff. To ensure that all stages of the process are carried out timeously and are properly recorded all stages are recorded within QL Housing Management system. Information from QL can be used in collating monitoring reports and in assisting internal audit procedures.

Information held will include details on the following:

- Receipt of termination form, expected tenancy end date, acknowledgement letter sent out, keys returned, pre-void inspection, works orders issued, recharge repairs info, confirmation of termination date, alteration of computer rent account system, CBL letting process start date, date available to let (after repairs if required), viewing date and reasons for refusals of

offers, signing date, approval request for housing support funding date, entry date, category of housed applicant e.g homeless person, transfer, waiting lists etc.

When the tenancy has been let, the Housing Officer completes an allocations' monitoring form which provides information about the source of let, number of applicants considered, number of refusals and reasons for the let not meeting the target if this is the case.

Individual void phase targets will be monitored and reviewed by the Housing Services Manager and the Property Services Manager.

[LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES](#)

The Void Management Policy has direct links to the following other policies and the content should be cross referenced with these documents.

- Allocations Policy.
- Reactive Maintenance Policy.
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Abandonment Policy
- Asset Management Policy
- Health and Safety Policy.