



The Langstane Group

Void Management Policy

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Board of Management	3 December 2018
Approval Date	3 December 2018
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Version	V1

Policy Version	Date of Approval	Changes made to Policy
Version 1	3 December 2018	Full re-write

1. Introduction

Langstane Housing Association is committed to ensuring that the turnover of housing stock is managed in such a way as to maximise rental income, meet housing need and maintain good estate management.

The Association aims to integrate issues of Equality and Diversity into all areas of operation, and the void management policy covers several activities. It is important that all customers are treated equally and sensitively in the allocation of properties, and that services are adaptable to meet the varying needs of the customer.

The term Void is used to describe a property when it is without a tenant for any length of time. A property can become void for a number of reasons. These include:

- Where a tenant terminates the tenancy in accordance with their lease agreement
- On the death of a tenant where there is no successor in accordance with legislation
- 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
- Where the tenant is transferred to another Association property

The void management activity covers a number of related activities. These include:

- Tenancy termination
- Inspections
- Identifying rechargeable works and other tenant responsibilities
- Ordering work
- Allocations
- Lease agreements

The process for allocating tenancies is covered in the Allocations Policy

2. Policy Statement

The aim of this policy is to provide the Association with a consistent and robust approach to managing properties that become void.

3. Objectives

- To ensure applicants are housed without unnecessary delay
- To minimise void rental loss
- To minimise end of tenancy arrears
- Reduce re-chargeable repair costs
- To achieve a uniform lettable standard

4. Links to other Policies

This policy links to a number of policies and strategies including but not limited to:

- Allocations Policy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Planned and Cyclical Maintenance Policy
- Lettable Standard
- Customer Care Charter
- Compensation and Redress Policy
- Recharge Repairs Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Legionella Policy
- Asbestos Policy

5. Policy

5.1. Termination Notice

28 days notice is required for all tenancies as prescribed by the Scottish Secure Tenancy, Short Scottish Secure Tenancy or otherwise stated in any lease agreement (for example a commercial lease). The termination will be acknowledged within **one working day** of receipt.

If a tenant returns the keys to their tenancy before the termination date then confirmation either verbally or in writing that the tenant has finished with the property will be taken and this information will be recorded on the housing management system.

The housing services officer or assistant will confirm to the tenant that they remain liable for the rent due until either the property is re-let before the termination date or the termination date is reached.

5.2. Pre Termination Inspections

A pre termination inspection will be carried out wherever possible within **three working days** of the tenant's notice being received. The main purpose of this inspection is to explain the lettable standard and:

- Identify any aspects of disrepair which are the tenants responsibility
- To agree what will be removed from/what will remain in the property
- To check any alterations carried out by the outgoing tenant and entitlement to compensation for improvements.

When a tenant decides to end their tenancy, a Housing Services Officer will carry out a pre-termination inspection. This will identify any repairs required and whether or not they are the responsibility of the tenant or the association.

Anything that is considered by the Housing Officer to be fair wear and tear will not be subject to recharge.

The tenant will be given the opportunity to rectify issues for which they are responsible before handing back the keys to the property.

If the tenant asks the Association to carry out repairs, these works have to be paid for in advance and carried out within an agreed timescale.

Once the keys have been handed back to the association, the tenant will not be allowed back into the property to carry out any outstanding repairs. If there is any question of the suitability of an alteration or improvement the Property Inspector will visit to assess the work and give the necessary advice.

Where flooring/carpets are judged to be in very good condition permission can be given for them to be left in situ. If carpets/flooring are left, incoming tenants will be asked to sign a disclaimer indicating that they are willing to take over responsibility for these items. The exception to this is laminate floor in flats above ground floor. In all cases this will be removed. In addition no permission will be given to tenants to lay laminated flooring in non ground floor properties.

5.3. Post Termination Inspections

The Property Services Officer will inspect the property when it becomes empty within **two working days** of keys being returned.

The purpose of this inspection will be to:

- Ensure the property is empty
- Ensure the property is secure
- Assess the property's condition against the Lettable Standard
- Complete mandatory checks according to inspection forms/lists
- Identify and assess any further repairs that are required to the property
- Assess the decorative standard and review the level of decoration allowance previously identified in the pre-termination inspection, if necessary

- Identify whether there are any outstanding items of disrepair which are the responsibility of the outgoing tenant
- Review qualifying improvements for compensation
- Arrange for gas and electrical appliances and installations to be professionally checked.
- Determine whether prospective tenants can view the property (if applicable)
- Update the Energy Performance Certificate if necessary
- Check whether any kitchen, bathroom or heating upgrades have been missed from programme of work.
- Check compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard including the number of sockets, hot water, cold water tank jackets and kitchen storage.

At this point further items may be discovered that were not previously identified if, for example, there was furniture in the way.

Photographs will be taken of each room of the property, repairs required and decoration or condition during the void inspection process. These are used to provide evidence of rechargeable repairs for example where:

- The tenant has not carried out the repairs identified at the pre-termination visit;
- The tenant did not carry out the required repairs satisfactorily;
- Damage has occurred or repair work identified following the pre-termination inspection
- The tenant left the property without giving notice
- The tenant did not allow a pre-termination visit to take place
- The tenant did not adhere to the items to be left, agreed in the pre-termination visit. This includes floor coverings, curtains, blinds and net curtains that were to be removed but have not been.

If a tenant has installed an electric shower without permission the shower will be checked to ensure it meets the required standard. If it meets the standard the association will take on responsibility for the future maintenance of it and the tenant will not be recharged. If the shower does not meet the standard, it will be removed and the tenant will be recharged.

If the tenant had permission to install a shower it will be left in the property, provided that it continues to meet the required standards. If it no longer meets the standard, it will be removed but the tenant will not be recharged.

If electric or gas appliances, such as built in ovens and hobs etc. have been fitted by the tenant and have been left in the property on termination they will be checked to ensure they meet the required standard. These will then

become the responsibility of the incoming tenant. The incoming tenant will be required to sign a disclaimer agreeing to this before the tenancy starts.

If they do not meet the standard, they will be removed and the tenant will be recharged. If the tenant removes any electrical items and leaves the wires in an unsafe manner the tenant will be recharged for making this safe.

The tenant will be charged for the removal of all non-compliant lighting installed in the property as these fail to meet electrical standards.

Where a property requires additional cleaning in order to meet the lettable standard i.e. a deep clean, this will be classed as a rechargeable repair and the tenant will be invoiced for the full amount.

5.4. Low Demand

When a vacancy arises which is in an area of low demand, in accordance with the Allocations Policy, the Association may adopt a Local Lettings Initiative (LLI) in order to ensure that empty properties are allocated without undue delay and performance is maximised.

All LLI's must be approved by the Board of Management.

A LLI may be used to:

- Stimulate low demand
- Provide a more flexible approach to the allocation policy (for example allocating a larger size of property than required)
- Advertise vacancies, whilst ensuring that all people who respond to the advert are prioritised based on housing need.
- Allow contact with local employers, especially those of key workers such as the Police and the NHS to find out if there are any potential applicants for the property

5.5. Decoration Vouchers

Langstane Housing Association has in place a facility to provide decoration vouchers to tenants. There is a separate procedure in place for how the Association processes vouchers.

A decision on issuing a decoration voucher can be taken at any point between a property becoming void and a new tenancy beginning or following disturbance as a result of works being undertaken on a property.

In terms of decoration where a property does not meet the lettable standard then decoration vouchers can be offered under the following circumstances –

- Staining to walls/ceilings as a result of heavy smoking.

- Poorly maintained decoration
- Where there is graffiti
- Where the property has been painted e.g. black and the incoming tenant would have difficulty in decorating
- Repairs to a property that have left an impact on the decoration of the property.

Decoration vouchers will be seen as a way to help meet the lettable standard and to enhance a property where otherwise it would be difficult to let.

The Property Services Officers will decide on a case by case basis whether to decorate the property at void or issue decoration vouchers.

5.6. Customer Satisfaction

All termination acknowledgement letters will be accompanied by a tenant exit satisfaction survey. The Association will use the data collected to analyse tenant satisfaction with the service in accordance with the Customer Care Charter.

In addition at the time of signing the lease agreement, the Allocations Team will provide the tenant with a 'new tenant satisfaction survey' form. This survey will ask a number of questions relating to the allocation and void processes. These responses help inform policy, procedure and customer satisfaction in relation to their new home.

Housing Management staff will aim to visit all new tenants within a four week period of the tenancy commencing. The main purpose of these visits is to ensure that the tenant has moved into the property, to ascertain if there are any issues, to check if applicable, that a universal credit application has been completed and to ensure that the satisfaction survey has been returned.

If the new tenant is deemed to be vulnerable, a settling in visit will be carried out within two weeks of the tenancy commencing by the Social Justice Team.

5.7. Compensation

Tenants have a right to claim compensation for certain improvements made to the property, provided the Association's permission to carry out the work was granted. Compensation is payable at the end of the tenancy.

The Property Services Manager calculates compensation. In order to provide a transparent service, the background to calculation of a compensation payment is provided to the recipient on an individual basis. Calculations will take into account the expected lifecycle of the components.

5.8. Legionella

In void properties and in accordance with the Legionella Policy, the Association will:

Short term voids (less than three weeks)

- Ensure water outlets (taps, toilet, wash hand basin, shower etc.) are run weekly
- Remove the shower head and disinfect or replace with new prior to the tenant moving in.
- Flush the system through completely immediately prior to the new tenants moving in if the property has been void for longer than 2 weeks.

Long terms voids (more than three weeks):

- Where a property will be void for longer than three weeks, it will usually be more cost-effective to drain down the water system. Immediately before letting, a specialist contractor agreed with Property Services will charge up the system, calculate the system capacity, chlorinate/disinfect accordingly and carry out a PH test to ensure levels are safe. This must be carried out in line with BS EN 806.
- If the decision is taken not to drain the system down, then a weekly flushing regime must be strictly followed.

For all voids:

- During void works, if dead legs are identified in the plumbing system they will be removed
- Cold water storage tanks will be checked to ensure lids are securely fitted. Missing or damaged lids will be replaced.
- System controls will be checked to ensure they meet safe limits.

5.9. Categories of Void Repairs

There are 3 categories that a void repair can be categorised as:

- Minor 5 days
- Standard 10 days
- Standard plus 20 days

Which category the void falls into is determined by the void inspector during the inspection process.

Void timescales will be monitored by the Team Leader in Property Services, chased where appropriate and where the contractor fails to meet a target will discuss this with them.

Where there are major repairs or structural work (e.g. to rectify damage caused by fire or flood) or modernisation work where the property would be unsafe to be occupied this will be passed to Asset Management to manage. The period in void will continue to be monitored by the Property Services Officer for that area.

5.10. Post Void Inspection

When the contractor has completed the void the property will be inspected by the Property Services Officer within **1 working day** to ensure that it meets the lettable standard and is suitable for re-letting. Where the property does not meet the required standard, the issues will be raised with the contractor immediately who will be asked to remedy any faults within a maximum of **two working days**. The property will be re-inspected by the Property Services Officer within this timescale.

5.11. Void Due to Tenant Death

Where a property has become void due to the death of a tenant, the tenancy ends at date of death. Where a next of kin is identified they will be given seven calendar days from the date of death where no rent will be charged to allow belongings to be removed from the property.

Full rent will be charged to the tenant's estate for any time beyond seven days unless otherwise indicated by the Housing Services Manager. If after the seven day period there appears to have been no attempt to commence the removal of possessions then **2 working days** notice will be given that the Association intends to change the locks and confirmation provided that any items left will be disposed of.

Where there is no next of kin or estate identified the Association will recover the property with immediate effect.

Where there is Police involvement the seven day period will begin from the date when the property is released back to the next of kin or the Association, following investigations being carried out.

5.12. Void Due to an Abandoned Property

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 s17 sets out the procedures which must be followed by a landlord recovering possession of an abandoned property. When the required four weeks notice is served on the tenant who has abandoned the property the process of identifying a new tenant will begin. If the abandonment does not proceed then the allocations process will cease.

A Property Inspector will arrange for an inspection on the day the locks are changed when the property is recovered and the void process will proceed as per the policy.

6. Monitoring, Review and Performance

The Void Management process is monitored weekly by Team Leaders with the appropriate Managers having an overview of the process.

- Number of voids, and their status including the number of days the property has been in each void phase
- Nature of Tenancy termination, and number of properties returned in lettable condition
- Offer refusal rates and reasons, and action taken in response to refusals
- Void turnaround times, highlighting any issues such as contractor or DLO delays, and the number of voids requiring major works
- Voids as a percentage of total stock
- Cost of works, and average cost per void

Staff will note the individual performance timescales for each phase of the void process within their area of work and adhere to these. In particular staff will work towards meeting the target set in the performance reports for re-letting properties. The timescales are noted on a separate flow chart for ease of reference. These will be monitored closely by the team leaders.

In addition, on an annual basis a sample of all void properties will be post inspected by the Property Services Manager once the void repairs are complete and the property is deemed ready to let. This will help ensure the quality of all void works undertaken meet the required standards.

Right to complain

In the event you are not satisfied with the service you have received, please contact the Association for a copy of the Complaints Policy. This can also be viewed on Langstane Housing Association's website – www.langstane-ha.co.uk

Equality and diversity

The Langstane Group / Langstane Housing Association is committed to promoting equality and diversity across all areas of work. Discrimination or harassment of any kind is not tolerated.

If you would like this document sent to you in large print, please contact Support Services on 01224 423000