



TOLLCROSS
housing association

Tollcross Housing Association Policy

Void Management

Scottish Housing Charter Outcomes

Value for money
Quality of Housing
Tenancy Sustainment

Date approved

25 January 2015

Date of last review

January 2018

Next Review Due

January 2021

Responsible Officers

**Technical Director
Housing Director**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Void Management Policy is Tollcross Housing Association's strategic approach to the management of housing properties from pre-termination stage to the re-letting of the property to a new tenant and works in conjunction with the Association's Termination Policy.
- 1.2 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 termination of a previous tenancy and the start of a new tenancy.
- 1.3 Successful management of void properties is crucial to the business of the Association. Rental income is lost while a property is void and whilst it is void it is vulnerable to deterioration and could be a target for vandalism.

2. Key Principles

- 2.1 Tollcross Housing Association (the Association) aims to manage the process of repairing and re-letting void properties in the minimum amount of time and to an acceptable standard of repair.
- 2.2 The Association will ensure the availability of its housing stock is maximised to meet the demand from housing applicants and will allocate its properties to match their needs and circumstances in relation to size and design.
- 2.3 Appropriate repairs to void properties will be carried out to satisfy contractual and legal obligations and to achieve the Association's lettable standard.
- 2.4 A sensible approach will be taken that whilst aiming to ensure that repair spending on void properties is within budget, this may need to be exceeded to achieve the lettable standard. An unacceptable lettable standard could lead to difficult to let voids which will incur additional loss of income.
- 2.5 Where appropriate, and where it is more cost effective to the Association, a decoration allowance will be given to incoming tenants to allow them to decorate the property to their own taste. Inspections will be carried out to ensure the work has been carried out by the new tenant and to an acceptable standard.
- 2.6 Outgoing tenants' responsibilities will be identified. When terminating their tenancy with the Association, tenants will be advised of their repair and redecoration requirements, to leave the property in a good state of repair and in a re-lettable condition. The Association will, if appropriate in the circumstances, raise recharges with the outgoing tenant for any work identified as their responsibility which had not been carried out to a satisfactory standard.
- 2.7 The above will also apply to tenants of the Association who wish to transfer to an alternative Association property. In addition, they will be required to fulfil their

tenancy responsibilities in relation to repair and decoration, and to clear any outstanding rechargeable repair costs prior to receiving an offer to transfer, unless there are extenuating circumstances where this would not be appropriate.

3. Aims & Objectives

- 3.1 The aims and objectives of this policy are therefore to:
- achieve a quick turnover of a void property.
 - minimise rental loss and maximise rental income.
 - make best use of the void property in relation to demand.
 - ensure the Association's contractual and legal obligations in relation to repair and lettable standard are fulfilled.
 - control void repair costs and budgets.
 - identify and advise outgoing tenants of their responsibilities.
 - ensure that outgoing tenants' contractual obligations are fulfilled and where work is not satisfactorily carried out by the tenants that appropriate recharges are raised and recovery is pursued.
 - ensure management of the void process is efficient and effective with appropriate records and IT systems being maintained.
 - apply Violent Profit Accounts when necessary in order to effectively manage void performance
- 3.2 In formulating this policy, reference has been made to the Scottish Housing Regulator's performance standard against which this policy, procedure and practice will be measured. Activity Standard, AS1.5 states:
- "We monitor demand for our houses and maximise the use of available housing, keeping empty properties and spaces in our shared accommodation to a minimum. We make sure our properties are of an appropriate lettable standard"*

4. Lettable Standard

- 4.1 The Association's housing properties are located in the Carmyle, Lilybank, Newbank and Tollcross areas and vary in type, built form and age. The condition of vacated properties inevitably varies due to age, wear and tear of fixtures and fittings and how the previous tenant has maintained their home.
- 4.2 The Association will have a minimum standard for letting its housing properties (see Appendix 1), below which no property will be relet. Appropriate repairs and/or replacement of fixtures and fittings will be carried out to vacant properties to comply with contractual and legislative requirements and the property will be in a habitable and clean condition for reletting.
- 4.3 The Association's lettable standard that will be reviewed on a three yearly basis in line with the Void Management Policy. The review will incorporate feedback from the Association's Performance Improvement Loop members in order to measure our customer's expectations. We will also look at all regulatory requirements and sector best practice in order to continuously improve this area of the business.

- 4.4 Information detailing the lettable standard will be provided to customers at the offer stage and will also be accessible via the Association's website and staff intranet.
- 4.5 The Association will aim to carry out major repair or replacement/planned maintenance work while the void property is vacant. Public utility services to the property will be available for the commencement of the new tenancy.
- 4.5 To assist the Association achieve a minimal void period, repairs of a minor nature may be carried out after the tenancy commences. The tenant will be advised of any outstanding minor repairs prior to the tenancy commencing.
- 4.6 To assist in minimising void maintenance repair costs, the Association will, where appropriate, issue decoration allowance vouchers to new tenants. A schedule indicating the required decoration work covered by the allowance will be kept in the tenant's file and with the void property records. Allowance amounts will be reviewed in line with Policy review timescales.
- 4.7 Alterations in void properties and/or non-standard fixtures carried out by or left by previous tenants will be left for the incoming tenant only where they are to an acceptable standard, fit for purpose, beneficial to the new tenant and are safe in relation to Health & Safety standards. If however the Association does not intend to maintain the alteration or non standard fixture in future years, this needs to be made clear to the incoming tenant who will require to take on and sign up to this responsibility when accepting the offer of the tenancy.
- 4.8 Where necessary for rechargeable repairs, evictions or abandonments a photographic record of the condition of the property will be taken by the Association at post-termination inspection stage and stored in the void property records.
- 4.9 Staff will endeavour at all times to recycle recoverable items from empty properties subject to this not having a negative impact on Key performance indicators or budgetary requirements.

5. Responsibilities

- 5.1 Responsibility for the repair, management, and allocation of void properties involves the Housing and Maintenance Departments.
- 5.2 The Finance Department also has responsibility in relation to raising rechargeable repairs and their recovery.
- 5.3 Close liaison between departments is essential and especially so between Housing and Maintenance Departments to ensure a void property is timeously moved through relevant stages. The key stages include pre termination stage (Housing and Maintenance) and post termination inspections (Maintenance); repairs to the property to bring to lettable standard and meet legislative requirements (Maintenance); selection and offer of the property to a new tenant (Housing); and the signing of the tenancy agreement on the day of let (Housing).

5.4 Department Managers have responsibility for drawing up, monitoring and reviewing the procedures for their department's areas of responsibility and for liaising with other Managers to ensure the Association's objectives and targets are being achieved and being reported to Committee and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

5.5 **Housing Department** responsibilities are to:

- arrange exit interviews with all outgoing tenant's to complete a termination of tenancy form. This will assist in improving timescales for pre-allocation and lettable standards, and allows staff to capture all information in relation to the property such as disabled adaptations, quality of property etc and reasons for terminating;
- organise a joint housing and maintenance pre-termination inspection of the property following receipt of the tenant's notification of termination;
- providing the outgoing tenant with information on their rent and other responsibilities prior to termination and obtaining information from the outgoing tenant regarding forwarding address etc to allow pursuance, if required, for arrears and rechargeable repairs;
- liaise with maintenance on joint letter confirming outcome of pre term inspection in relation to rent; tenant responsibility requirements; and recharges if not done etc and issue to tenant. control and monitor the movement of void property inspection forms/paperwork between departments, tenants, and prospective tenants;
- record certain key dates and stages through which each void property progresses on the void management computerised system;
- monitor the computerised system to ensure that no unnecessary delays occur in each void property and that individual timescales of stages are being met and the system is being updated;
- liaise with Maintenance staff as appropriate to ensure information and paperwork is progressed timeously;
- select suitable candidates from the housing, section 5, or transfer housing lists for the allocation of void properties;
- issue offer to prospective tenant and arrange accompanied viewing of the property and agree tenancy start date;
- liaise with the Maintenance Officer as appropriate if a void property is being refused due to condition;
- carry out formal let day procedure with each new tenant, sign tenancy agreements and carry out a 'settling' in visit shortly after the commencement of the tenant's tenancy;
- update tenancy records on void management computerised system with termination and commencement of tenancy dates, setting appropriate termination dates to meet contractual and legal requirements;
- prepare void statistical and performance reports and report appropriate statistics to the Operations Sub-Committee and the Management Committee;
- create violent profit accounts on the SDM system for appeals cases i.e succession appeals, decree appeals;
- Managers to analyse void management reports and liaise with the Maintenance Manager, where appropriate, on performance management issues;

- liaise where necessary with benefit agencies for any outstanding rent and pursue ex-tenants for recovery.
- at new tenancy visit establish whether decoration has been carried out and advise Maintenance Officer for follow up inspection etc.

Transfers:

Where the Association intend to consider a tenant for a transfer to alternative accommodation, the housing department will be responsible for:

- organising a joint housing and maintenance pre-transfer inspection of the property to establish any repair and redecoration work required to be carried out by the tenant prior to an offer being made;
- explaining to the tenant their requirements prior to receiving a transfer offer;
- liaising with the Maintenance Officer re completion of the work prior to selecting the tenant applicant for offer.

Housing management staff requires planning ahead regarding joint inspections and work requirements, prior to a void property becoming available to allow the tenant time to do pre transfer work and to save any void loss.

5.6 **Maintenance Department** responsibilities are to:

- carry out a pre-termination inspection of the property (preferably jointly with the Housing Officer) and explain to the outgoing tenant any repair and redecoration work that they require to do before handing in their keys;
- liaise with housing staff on joint pre term letter to allow them to issue a letter to the tenant confirming tenant responsibility requirements etc.
- carry out post termination inspections;
- establish any outstanding work requirements of the outgoing tenant, confirm in writing to the tenant and liaise with Finance in raising any rechargeable repairs;
- establish repair and maintenance responsibilities of the Association;
- raise works orders with approved contractors and monitor that the work is carried out to the Association's satisfaction/to acceptable standards and that it is completed within relevant timescales;
- establish and set decoration allowances if appropriate;
- provide projected and completed dates to housing department to assist in the re-allocation of the property;
- record certain key dates and stages through which each void property progresses on the void management computerised system;
- liaise with housing staff regarding the progression of the void works or if projected dates are unlikely to be met;
- control and monitor the movement of keys between contractors and provide housing management with keys for accompanied viewing and a full set of keys prior to the day of let to the new tenant;
- ensure public utility services are available in the property e.g. credit meters cleared and ready for use;

- carry out final inspection of the property prior to let and ensure that all necessary paperwork, is passed to housing for the day of let;
- where necessary for rechargeable repairs, evictions or abandonments Maintenance Officers will take photographic evidence of the property at post termination inspection stage and store these with property records / on IT or void management system software;
- update property records with any adaptations and/or alterations to the property;
- analyse void management reports and liaise with the Housing Manager, where appropriate, on performance management issues;
- carry out inspection of property after let stage on request of HO/HA to ensure the new tenant completes required decoration to an acceptable standard and in accordance with the redecoration requirements (identified at post term inspection stage);
- carry out monthly inspections of vacant properties where all repair works have been completed and they are ready to let, and record that these inspections have taken place.

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- carrying out a pre-transfer inspection of the property (preferably jointly with the Housing Officer) to establish any repair and redecoration work required to be carried out by the tenant prior to an offer being made;
- providing information to HO to allow issuing a letter to the tenant confirming tenant responsibility requirements;
- inspecting the property when the tenant confirms work is complete and liaising with the Housing Officer on the outcome and when the tenant has completed their responsibilities to an acceptable standard.

5.7 **Finance Department** responsibilities are to:

- ensure that end of tenancy adjustments, where required, are finalised through the rents system;
- raise invoices for rechargeable repairs;
- monitor ex-tenant accounts on rechargeable repairs and pursue recovery;
- transfer any credits on rent account to rechargeable accounts.

5.8 Department Managers have responsibility to monitor and ensure that the specific tasks which are the responsibility of their departments are being carried out within set timescales and that the service and the product being delivered are of a good standard.

6. **Procedures & Staff Training**

6.1 The Association will develop and maintain comprehensive procedures which reflect the commitments of this Policy. These procedures will guide and direct the actions of staff from housing, maintenance and finance departments who will have identified responsibilities in void management and rechargeable repairs.

- 6.2 The Association will invest in a computerised void management system allowing staff to record key information, and monitor progress of the void property through several stages from pre-termination; repair; offer; to re-let.
- 6.3 Staff will be provided with in-house and external training on void management. Training will cover the requirements of this policy; the procedures; the IT system; health & safety and legislative requirements in property management.

7. Targets & Performance Monitoring

- 7.1 Performance targets and timescales will be set for departments and staff in progressing a void property through the key stages, which include pre and post termination inspections; repairs to the property; selection, offer and accompanied viewing; and the signing of the tenancy agreement on the day of let.
- 7.2 Organisational targets will be identified jointly by the Housing Director and Technical Director each year and recommended for approval by Committee, and will include:
- average time to re-let void properties (in calendar days),
 - average time to let new properties (in calendar days)
 - voids available for re-letting as a % of housing stock,
 - rental income lost as a % of total rental income
 - the % of void properties re-let within 1 month; between 1 and 2 months; and more than 2 months.
- 7.3 Reports will be produced to assist in measuring performance against targets and will allow comparison of results on a month to month and year on year basis indicating trends and highlighting where performance requires to be investigated and addressed.
- 7.4 The Association's performance will also be monitored against derived information from other organisations through possible benchmarking arrangements and comparisons of performance statistics reported by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 7.5 Collectively, Departmental Managers will be responsible for ensuring the Association's void management objectives and overall targets are being achieved. They will be required to introduce improvements in the operation of void management if possible or necessary or in line with legislative changes or good property management guidelines.
- 7.6 Periodic audits of the void management function will be carried out, to assess performance and check compliance with policy, procedures and good practice and highlighting areas which may need to be addressed.

Role of Committee

- 8.1 Committee Members will be concerned with the overall strategy and policy to be adopted in relation to void management. They will monitor performance in void management against Key Performance Indicators to assess the impact on loss of rental income and service delivery.
- 8.2 Statistical reports on void management will be presented quarterly to the Operations Committee and annually to the Management Committee. The content of these reports and the amount of detailed information provided will reflect the Association's standing orders and scheme of delegated authority between the Committees.
- 8.3 In accordance with the scheme of delegated authority, Committee Members on the Operation's Sub-Committee will be responsible for:
- Reviewing and approving the Void Management Policy
 - Considering and implementing as appropriate recommendations made by the Performance Monitoring groups
 - Scrutinising and monitoring performance in void management
 - Comparing the Association's performance against targets and the performance of peers.

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 The Association will seek to ensure that in implementing this policy and its associated procedures, no group, organisation or individual will receive less favourable treatment or be discriminated against regardless of their race, colour, ethnic or national origin, sex, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age or other grounds.

10. Complaints

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 All complaints will be fully investigated in accordance with the Association's Complaints Policy. A written guide on the complaints process is readily available to customers on request and is on display in the reception area of the office.

11. Review & Consultation

- 11.1 The Association will formally review this policy at least every three years. A review within this period may however be carried out as required to make amendments due to legislative changes, performance requirements or changes to the Association's Standing Orders and delegated authority to Committees and to the Management Team. The Policy will be put out to consultation during this review process, and all feedback will be considered prior to implementation.

11.2 The Decoration Allowance amount will also be reviewed as part of the Policy review process.