



# Void Management Policy

## ***AVAILABILITY OF POLICY***

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**Clydesdale Housing Association Limited is a Registered Scottish Charity (SCO34228)**

## **1. Introduction**

Our mission statement is **“To provide high quality affordable homes and regenerate communities”**. Our ability to deliver this promise depends on the quality of our policies and procedure and our performance in delivering our services. This Policy outlines Clydesdale Housing Association’s (the Association) approach to the management of void properties.

## **2. Performance Standards and Good Practice**

The reference documents used in the compilation of this document are as follows:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- Part 5 of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement
- Chapter 7 of *Raising Standards in Housing* (Maintenance)
- Chapter 19 of *Raising Standards in Housing* (Void Management)
- *Performance Standards for Registered Social Landlords*, particularly sections AS1.1, AS1.2, AS1.3, AS1.5, AS1.9, AS1.10, AS2.1 to AS2.4, and all the relevant Guiding Standards that underpin these Activity Standards.
- The Chartered Institute of Housing Good Practice Unit
- Managing Housing Voids, The impact of low demand properties prepared for the Accounts Commission and Communities Scotland

## **3. Policy Objectives**

Our primary objective is to have an efficient and effective void management process.

There are over-arching principles which are translated into the following policy objectives.

1. To ensure that all legal and statutory obligations are carried out
2. To consult with tenants and prospective tenants to develop the re-let standard to be adopted
3. To let homes which are in a good state of repair at the time of allocation.
4. To reduce the number of people refusing our properties.
5. To minimise re-let times by starting the allocation process as quickly as possible.
6. To protect the financial viability of the Association by reducing void rent loss.
7. To assist in meeting house need.
8. To maintain our properties to a standard which makes them desirable properties to live in and which helps to sustain our communities
9. To gather customer feedback on the quality of our service and respond to the needs of our tenants.

10. To ensure equality and diversity is achieved in accessing the range of maintenance services
11. To improve the void management process through ongoing self-assessment of Performance Standards and good practice and review and evaluation of the range of services provided.

#### **4. Achieving Policy Objectives**

An annual void management outcome report will be circulated to Committee detailing how the policy objectives have been met. The range of activities which feed into this process is as follows:

- Carry out policy and procedure reviews to improve service delivery
- Prepare outcome reports on tenant consultation exercises and implement changes if possible within the resources available.
- Gather customer feedback on the condition of our properties and analyse results.
- Carry out detailed analysis of our housing stock turnover, specifically:
  - Analysis of demand by area and house type
  - Analysis of turnover by area and house type
  - Reasons for refusal
  - Results of Exit surveys
  - Results of “SCORE” returns for re-let properties
- Analyse the cost of empty property repairs to ensure the level of expenditure is consistent with the re-let standard.
- Monitor equality and diversity returns to provide a service which meets the needs of all our tenants
- Set challenging but realistic targets for:
  - Void repairs being carried out
  - Average time to re-let a property
- Monitor performance against our key performance indicators and targets and take remedial action where required.
- Assess our performance against Communities Scotland Performance Standards and good practice information.

#### **5. Definitions of Void Properties**

We are required to measure how quickly we re-let vacant properties. The definition contained in the Annual Performance and Statistical Return to measure performance is:

***“The void period is the time, measured in calendar days, between the date of termination of a previous tenancy or repossession and the start date of a new tenancy”.***

We are required to break down our performance in re-letting properties in two ways.

Firstly, properties which are not difficult to let; and

Secondly, properties which are difficult to let. A definition of low demand is contained below.

### ***Difficult to Let Properties***

A property which is deemed difficult to let is a property where one of the following conditions apply:

- Where there is a small or non-existent waiting list for the property
- Where offers of tenancy are refused frequently for reasons other than personal reasons
- Where there is higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover for a property in that area.

### **6. *Managing the Risk of Difficult to Let Properties***

Properties which are difficult to let require can on occasion, require a more strategic approach. To be able to do this, it is important that the Association gathers information about the turnover of its stock and puts in place some initiatives to minimise the risk of lost rent and the development becoming less desirable for future tenants.

### ***Low Demand Strategy***

Stock which is classified as difficult to let is likely to change over time. This will largely depend on how successfully these properties are managed. Low demand properties can be the properties which are frequently rejected or accepted reluctantly every by those people in urgent housing need.

The reasons why properties can be difficult to let include:

#### **1. Environmental Factors**

The research carried out by the Audit Commission and Communities Scotland suggests that the reputation of a property or estate can have a major impact on the demand level and this is one of the hardest issues to overcome.

This can be because of high crime rates and anti-social behaviour in the area.

#### **2. Aspirational Factors**

The research also suggests that people may be moving away from renting and either buying their house through the right to buy or buying on the open market. While the quality of housing association stock is generally very good, it may that where this a large uptake of right to buy, it reduces the available stock left, some of which may not be as desirable or of such a good quality.

#### **3. Management or Policy Factors**

It is important to note that the allocations policy could have be a determining factor in properties becoming difficult to let, for example, where the occupancy standards do not allow under-occupation. This could have the effect of falsely restricting demand.

### ***Low Demand Initiatives***

There are a number of things which can be done to minimise low demand properties, and include:

- Providing incentives – this can be the payment of a decoration grant or tidying up the garden for the incoming tenant.
- Marketing properties – this can be done through advertising to stimulate demand or providing more detailed information to prospective applicants on the surrounding amenities such as schools, transports links, hospitals etc.
- Lettings initiatives – can be used or developed where there is a need to alter the balance of the community. They are usually only in place for a limited period of time and can provide an element of flexibility in allocating properties by:
  - The allocation of properties to applicants in non-priority groups
  - Allow under-occupation to promote longer-term tenancies and reduce child density
  - Change the proportion of people houses through different access routes e.g., transferring tenants.

Lettings initiatives should only be put in place where there is a clear definition of the problem which is backed up by evidence; the method contained in the initiative is likely to address the problem; some analysis of potential adverse impact; how the initiative will be monitored and by whom; and proposals for reporting and review it.

The Association will monitor success against its Low Demand Strategy which will be included in reports to the Management Committee.

### **7. *Re-Let Standard***

We have a re-let standard which has been prepared in consultation with our tenants.

The re-let standard we have goes beyond providing a wind and watertight property which is safe and fit for habitation.

It is important to note that when developing a relet standard, there needs to be a balance between the aspirations of prospective tenants and the cost to ensure the re-let standard is good but not prohibitively expensive.

A re-let standard should include the following:

- It should be clear and easy to understand
- It should be given to incoming tenants so they know what to expect
- It should always cover health and safety issues such as essential gas and electrical safety checks
- It should cover cleanliness and the state of repair we expect the property to be returned to us in
- It needs to be monitored to make sure it is being implemented and to

make sure the costs are being kept under control

The Association gathers feedback on the condition of the property at the settling in visit. This allows us to measure satisfaction levels with the re-let standard.

The Re-Let Standard is contained in Appendix 1.

### ***Incentive Schemes***

It is unfortunate, but despite tenants being reminded of their responsibilities at the end of tenancy visit, not all houses are left clean and clear of possessions. This results in an additional cost to the Association which can be very difficult to recover from the former tenant.

Through tenant consultation, it has been agreed that we should offer tenants £50 to remove all of their belongings and clean out the property. There are conditions attached to this which are explained below:

1. The payment will only be made once the property has been pre-inspected and it has been confirmed the property is clean and clear of possessions.
2. Where there are rent arrears, the payment will be used to offset the arrears in line with the first condition.
3. The payment can be used to offset any rechargeable repairs which have been agreed with the tenant.

Information will be gathered on how successful the incentive scheme is at reducing void repair costs, and the Association reserves the right to withdraw it if it becomes too expensive.

## **8. Void Management Performance**

Void management performance activity includes the following

### ***Weekly Void Meetings***

The range of issues which are discussed at the weekly void meetings are:

- Current and pending voids in relation to the pre-allocation process
- Reasons for refusal
- Customer feedback on the condition of the property
- Issues from the pre-termination visits
- Turnover rates
- Properties being held up for repair
- Major repairs required (if applicable)

### ***End of Tenancy Visits***

Are carried out by the Housing Officers to:

- Make sure tenants are aware of how the property should be left – clean, clear of personal belongings and in a good state of repair
- To identify and agree visible re-chargeable repairs

### **Key Performance Indicators**

Performance against the following key performance indicators is carried out:

- Average time to re-let a property
- % of void rent lost
- Performance against void repair targets – 5 days for standard repairs and 20 days for major void repairs

### **Pre Inspections**

- To identify repairs required to bring the property up to the re-let standard

### **Post Inspections**

- To make sure essential safety checks are carried out
- To make sure repairs are carried out efficiently and to a good standard so that there are no delays in the allocation process.

## **9. Customer Feedback**

Customer feedback is an integral part of service delivery. Any proposals to change an aspect of service delivery can only be implemented following tenant consultation.

On an ongoing basis, customer feedback is gathered across a range of housing management activities but specifically in relation to the following for void properties:

- The reason for refusing a property
- The condition of the property when let
- Satisfaction with the re-let standard

The customer feedback results are discussed during the monthly performance management meetings which take place.

We use a wide range of methods for consulting with tenants in order to provide some choice for tenants wishing to take up various levels of involvement. These include:

- Focus groups
- Postal, phone and door-to-door surveys
- House visits
- Tenants Conferences
- Discussions with tenants' organisations
- Road shows, public Committee meetings
- Consultation registers
- Resident involvement in routine estate inspections and grounds maintenance contract quality control checks.

The format for gathering customer feedback using questionnaires has been developed to allow an assessment of how well the process is working. If an

area of a process is receiving negative feedback, then this is likely to result in a change to the way we deliver our services.

A customer feedback report is circulated to Management Committee quarterly.

### **9. Service Delivery Standards**

The Association will deliver the following standard of service:

1. We inspect every void property within 2 days of the keys being handed in.
2. We will post inspect every void property where there is a health and safety issue identified
3. We will re-let our properties within 12 working days.
4. We will carry out an end of tenancy visit with every tenant unless the tenant refused access to the Housing Officer.
5. We will carry out a settling-in visit with every new tenant one month after they have moved in.
6. We will attempt to recover all rechargeable repair costs identified
7. We will pay tenants an incentive to clean, and clear the property of all personal belongings.

### **10. Equality and Diversity**

The Association recognises that providing a fair, effective and efficient maintenance service includes recognising that not all tenants are the same. There are tenants who may experience barriers to accessing the repairs and maintenance service. This could be for a number of reasons for example:

- Language difficulties with English not being the first language
- A physical condition
- Mental ill health
- Literacy problems
- Vulnerable tenants

It is therefore important that there is flexibility built into the processes which underpin the service delivery to take account, where possible, of individual needs.

To be able to do this, it is necessary to seek the views of equality and diversity groups to improve the service delivery to them, or to introduce specific elements of service delivery to meet their needs.

Any changes to service delivery which would result in an enhanced service being offered in some instances could only be introduced following tenant consultation.

The Association has a separate Equality and Diversity Policy which is on the website and which can be made available on request.

### **11. Stakeholders**

The stakeholders to this policy are:

- Our tenants
- Our future tenants
- Our contractors
- Our Management Committee
- Communities Scotland
- South Lanarkshire Council

### **12. Links to Other Policies**

This Policy is linked to our Allocations Policy; Our Repairs and Maintenance Policy; Our Tenant Participation Policy; Our Equality and Diversity Policy and our Performance Management Policy.

### **13. Revision Period**

This Policy will be revised every 3 years, or earlier if required either by changes in legislation, or customer feedback.

<b>Approved by the Committee of Management on:</b>	
<b>Signed:</b>	<b>Signed:</b>
<b>Secretary/Chairperson</b>	<b>Staff Member</b>

## APPENDIX 1: MINIMUM LETTABLE STANDARD

Within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Association has a duty to “ensure that a house is wind and watertight and reasonably fit for human habitation, both at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout its term.”

This definition does not provide much guidance for Housing Management or Maintenance staff who are required to make decisions based on the condition of the property. The following minimum standards have been adopted after consultation with tenants.

Works	Minimum Standard	Tenant	Landlord
General Cleanliness	The house will be cleared of furniture, carpets, laminated flooring ( <b>unless by prior agreement with a Housing/Maintenance Officer</b> ) and belongings/ rubbish from the previous tenant. Floors should be swept out, kitchen and bathrooms surfaces to be washed down. Attics, basements and out buildings should be emptied.	Yes	
Garden Areas	Tenants gardens should be cleared of rubbish and grass cut prior to moving out	Yes	
Electrical Safety Checks	All electrics must be checked and a certificate of inspection issued to new tenant. The Association retains one copy on file.		Yes
Electrics	Alterations to the electric system clearly undertaken by the tenant to be removed and returned to the original state unless a compliance certificate covers the alteration, or this is not deemed necessary by the Maintenance or Housing Officer.	Yes	
Gas Safety Checks	All houses with gas central heating to have a full gas safety check undertaken and compliance certificate issued to the new tenant. Where gas supply is purely to a gas cooker the carcassing should have a visual check carried out.		Yes
Gas/Electric Cooking	Where the previous tenant has left a gas or electric cooker, this should be removed as we are unable to certify their safety. In exceptional circumstances, the cooker may be left at the discretion of the Housing or Maintenance Officer.		Yes
Smoke Alarm	The smoke alarm(s) should be tested as part of the electric safety check.		Yes
Water Supply	During the months October - April or during severe cold spells, the Association may in extreme circumstances shut off and the water supply and drain down the system.		Yes
Windows	All windows should be operational and checked for safety. Window keys should be issued to tenants if these are available.		Yes
Front Door and Back Doors	Standard locks and doors as provided by the Association should be in place and in working order. All sets of keys should be handed back. Additional	Yes	Yes

	locks, chains etc can be left at the Association's discretion. There should be a letterbox and back flap on all front doors.		
Internal Pass Doors	All pass doors should be intact and operating properly. Levers and handles should be present and operational.	Yes	
Floors	All loose and missing floorboards to be re-secured/ replaced. Floor surface to be even to allow carpets to be laid.	Yes	Yes
Skirtings and facings	Missing or badly damaged skirtings/ facings to be replaced. If possible to repair – should be re-secured and filled where necessary.	Yes	
Bedroom cupboards	Shall all have a level shelf and clothes rail below, or as supplied originally at let	Yes	
Kitchen Units	Fair wear and tear apart, all kitchen units shall be in good working order. Carcasses drawers, doors and worktops which are damaged or burnt through tenant neglect shall be replaced and recharged to tenant.	Yes	
Bathroom Suite	Bathroom suite should be checked for chips/cracks and items replaced as required. If colour match is not available, a 3 piece bathroom suite will be installed	Yes	Yes
Shower Unit	Instantaneous electric showers will not be removed if they are electrically safe.		Yes
Decoration	The Association is generally not responsible for the condition/level of decoration in a property. However, where the condition of the decoration is deemed to be so bad as to affect the likelihood of anyone accepting the property, then a minimum decoration allowance may be given.	Yes	Yes