

Policy on:	Void Management
Compliant with Charter Outcomes and Standards:	7,8,9 Housing Options. 10 Access to Social Housing 11 Tenancy Sustainment. 13 Value for Money; and 14 and 15- Rents and Service charges
Compliant with Tenant Participation Strategy:	Consult with our registered tenant organisations, promote our aims and objectives, and receive feedback
Compliant with Equal Opportunities:	Yes
Compliant with Business Plan:	To minimise void loss and re-let times both support business viability and good performance results.
Compliant with Risk	Risk assessment undertaken and included in matrix - Risk Twelve Asset Management, lack of demand.
Date for Approval:	February 2022
Date for Review:	February 2025
Responsible Officers:	Customer Service Manager/Asset Manager

This policy is available, on request, in different languages and in other formats such as large print, audio format and braille as required.



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1. Introduction

This policy describes the activities and responsibilities involved in the re-letting of existing Shire HA properties.

The Association will allocate all of our vacant (void) properties quickly, deliver a consistent quality of accommodation in line with our published Re-Let Standard, minimise rent loss from empty properties and deliver an excellent customer experience.

The Void Management Policy (VMP) aims to ensure that the Shire Housing Association:

- allocates all of our vacant (void) properties quickly,
- delivers a consistent quality of accommodation,
- minimises rent loss as a result of properties being empty
- delivers an excellent customer experience.
- Achieves excellent communication between the Shire Team and our Void Repair contractors.
- Consistently delivers high quality repair work.

Every property that we allocate should be let in accordance with the East Ayrshire Common Housing Allocation Policy and should meet our Re-Let Standard.

2. Objectives

- To make best use of our housing stock to meet the need and demand in East Ayrshire by effective allocation of empty properties using the East Ayrshire Common Housing Allocation Policy and Common Register, Homeless Protocols, and other partnership arrangements.
- To minimise void rent loss, void periods, and void repair costs. Ensuring the effective and accountable management of our housing stock.
- Ensure that tenants are aware of their end of tenancy obligations. Minimise end of tenancy debt, return the property in good condition to minimise re-let costs or re-chargeable repair costs.
- Enable effective monitoring of void management performance to inform future risk and assess the impact on our Business Plan and Asset Management Strategy.
- To comply with our statutory duties and meet the outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. To maintain the quality of the housing stock by completing void works to an agreed specification (re-let standard) and in accordance with set time scales.



- To provide the necessary support and signposting to customers to achieve a high level of tenancy sustainment.

3. Legislation and Regulation

Policy meets with legislative and good practice requirements including the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the associated number of key indicators identified by the Scottish Housing Regulator as relevant to void management by which it will measure landlord performance, including the following;

- Quality of housing – tenants' 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.
- Energy Efficiency in Scottish Social Housing (ESSH) sets the minimum energy efficiency standard for social housing in Scotland. It has been developed by the Scottish Government following consultation with social landlords and tenants. Landlords must ensure that all social housing meets this new standard by December 2020.
- Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes – tenants and others live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.
- Value for money – tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

In addition, the following is a brief summary of the legislation that impacts the VMP:

- The Data Protection Act 2018 • The Equality Act 2010
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Human Rights Act 1998 • Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003

4. Tenancy Terminations

The Scottish or Short Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement sets out the requirements for ending a tenancy and the subsequent tenancy terminations are classified as follows:

- **Tenancy Termination.** Tenants are required to provide 28 days written notice that they are intending to end the tenancy. The notice period can be varied in exceptional circumstances as determined by the Customer Services Manager.
- **Death of a Tenant.** The tenancy will cease on the date of death. If no qualifying occupant has



entitlement to succeed to the tenancy, normal termination and allocation processes will begin. Cases will be treated sensitively, and representatives of the deceased will be given 2 weeks to clear the property and return keys. This may be extended in exceptional circumstances as determined by the Customer Service Manager

- **Abandonment of Tenancy.** In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, we will take possession of abandoned properties where all avenues of enquiry to establish occupancy have been exhausted. The range of enquiries undertaken to establish occupancy shall include but not be limited to contact with listed next of kin, neighbours and other agencies. Normal void management and allocation procedures will follow.

If furniture has been left in the property, an assessment will be made to establish if the items are worth more than the costs to transport and store them or recover any outstanding debt. Photographic evidence will be taken, and items will be stored for a period of 6 months. If the customer has not contacted the Association within this period, the furniture can be disposed of.

- **Eviction.** Where we have successfully sought a repossession order through the court to end a tenancy, usually for arrears of rent or anti-social behaviour, the date of tenancy termination will be the date within the repossession order. The allocation process can begin when the eviction is scheduled.
- **Transfers to existing Tenants.** Where an existing tenant is pre-allocated for housing, no formal offer will be made until an inspection of their current property and rent account is completed. This ensures the objectives of this policy are met in relation to tenants meeting their end of tenancy obligations.

We monitor reasons for termination of tenancy to analyse property, environmental or other issues to identify trends to support targeted initiatives to reduce turnover and promote sustainability.

When a property is terminated and becomes void we apply the following void classifications:

- Demand Properties where we have a healthy number of more than 10 housing applicants on the housing waiting list and there are typically no more than 2 refusals on any offers made.
- Low Demand Properties where we have less than 3 housing applicants on the housing waiting list and/or properties where we have 3 or more refusals for non-personal reasons and/or properties within a letting area with a higher than normal rate of turnover
- Off Charge Voids where there is a need for major repair and/or refurbishment works and/or for disposal (sale or demolition) and/or the property is a long term



void (vacant more than 6 months) has no demand as approved by the Management Board.

5. Void Management Process

The processes that we adopt are set out in full detail in our Void Management Procedures and summarised below:

- Pre-termination Arrangements

Tenants are generally required to give us 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.

At that point we will arrange to carry out a pre-termination inspection of the property. 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 housing clearance, arrangements for meter readings, identification of any outstanding rent and any rechargeable repairs.

We expect outgoing tenants to leave their property cleared, cleaned and in good condition and also to provide us with forwarding address so that we can follow up any queries.

During the notice period where practical, we will endeavour to carry out repairs subject to access.

In the circumstances where we do not receive notice and where it is not possible to carry out a pre-termination visit, such as where the tenant has died, where a property has been abandoned by the former tenant or where the former tenant has been evicted, our aim will be to have keys returned or have locks changed as quickly as practically possible so that the property can be relet without undue delay.

- End of Tenancy

Once a tenancy has been ended, we will update our tenancy and property records, and arrange for the void property to be jointly inspected by the Housing Officer and Maintenance Officer, necessary repairs instructed, identify and pursue any debt and allocate the property.

- Void Repairs

All of our empty properties will be inspected to assess their condition, suitability for reletting and to instruct



repairs. Our properties require to be wind and watertight, safe and secure, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and to be energy efficient by achieving the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH).

Our Re-Let Standard (Appendix 1) sets out the type of repair work that will be carried out for a property to be ready for let.

Planned programme renewals will generally be carried out when the property is occupied to coincide with the approved investment timetable in accordance with Shire HAs planned maintenance programme. However, in certain circumstance 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.

Where items have been left by the outgoing tenant, the property is not found to be in a reasonable state of cleanliness and there is deliberate damage then the outgoing tenant will be recharged (where financially viable) for clearing/cleaning the property and making good the damage

6. Allocation Process

We will commence the allocation process as soon as we have formal notification of a void property. The selection of potential tenants and allocation of properties will be carried out strictly in accordance with the Common Housing Allocation Policy. Where possible we will pre-allocate void properties.

We work in partnership with East Ayrshire Council, Atrium Homes, Irvine Housing Association and Cunninghame Housing Association to operate a Common Housing Register (CHR) and a Common Allocations Policy (CAP) within East Ayrshire. The principal aim of the partnership is to provide easy access to housing for all applicants offering a common approach in the allocation of social rented properties across the region.

The partnership allows access to the wide pool of applicants in housing need and contributes towards minimising the amount of time that our properties are empty.

Where we have identified an interested applicant, we will notify them by phone as soon as keys are available for viewing. In all cases the viewing will be carried out accompanied by the Customer Services Assistant (Allocations) and/or Housing Officer.

However, there is also discretion for us to carry out viewings prior to the previous tenancy ending.

Where an offer of tenancy is accepted, a Tenancy Agreement will be signed. As well as the date of entry, this includes 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.



Every new tenant will receive a settling-in visit that will be carried out normally within 30 working days of the tenancy start date.

7. Dealing with Low Demand or Difficult to Let (DTL)

Asset Management is a core part of our business to address difficult to let stock.

Low demand is categorised at part 4 of this policy and these factors combined with external risks such as welfare reform, low demand for larger family housing in economically challenging rural areas and depopulation is a heightened area of concern for the association.

Low demand has significant resource implications for the association with an increase in long standing voids, longer than average re-let times and a potential detrimental impact on communities. The Association is working closely with strategic partners to counter the effects of low demand in areas such as Bellsbank, Dalmellington and Westgate House in the Irvine Valley

Our response to low demand involves improving access to housing stock through Marketing Initiatives and development of asset management plans.

- Widely advertise and market available properties
- Offer New Tenant Incentive Packages
- Property re-configuration of larger 3beds properties to 2 beds
- Regularly review and analyse housing demand to support re-configuration or asset proposals
- Work closely with partners to expand customer demand across all Ayrshire
- On-going strategic assessment of the impact of Difficult to Let stock on the Business Plan

Incentive Packages

To encourage increased demand for our stock, in Difficult to Let areas, and help to achieve sustainable tenancies, we use a range of incentive measures, these include.

- additional internal works above and beyond the Re-Let Standard.
- kitchen and bathroom flooring.
- Partial carpeting of up to 3 rooms.
- Welfare fund applications.
- Access to local furniture schemes
- Provision of window blinds or dressings at the Westgate House flats where high height windows are a common feature; and where welfare assistance is not available

The level of incentive will be assessed at the pre-allocation visit or during signup for approval by the Customer Service Manager. The Customer Service Manager and the Customer Service Advisor will monitor activity within the set budget.



8. Properties Off-Charge

A summary of the reasons why a property may be taken off charge are outlined at part 4 of this policy and we may take properties off-charge in the following circumstances.

- Unlettable due to major repair or structural work to make a property safe for occupation.
- Held for decant purposes (occupied or void) required for use as part of modernisation or a similar project; and
- Where a property insurance claim is required to bring a property up to a habitable standard; and
- awaiting a Board decision on future action.

In these circumstances, the Customer Service Manager will request approval from the Head of Housing before taking a property off charge.

In cases of major repair or insurance work, properties will be put back on charge from the date the work was completed. This is important to verify accurate rent loss of an insurance claim and accurate re-let performance in line with regulatory requirements.

Board approval is required in the following circumstances before taking properties off-charge.

- Where properties are void for 6 months or more and are not being actively re-let because they are surplus to long-term requirements; or
- A disposal strategy to transfer, dispose of, demolish, or reconfigure the properties is required or in place.

9. Feedback and Complaints

Shire Housing Association strives to provide an excellent customer service at all times and welcomes feedback and comments from our customers. We will seek feedback via our website, e-mail, in writing and verbally to learn from service users experiences, using them to shape and develop our service.

We operate a Complaints Policy that is open and transparent, should any customer or service user feel the need to make a complaint against an individual or the organisation, the complaints policy and procedure will be implemented. All complaints will be recorded and dealt with under Complaints Policy and Procedures, which meet the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

10. Equality and Diversity

The Association will comply with the terms of our Equality and Diversity policy and our commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities throughout our day to day business. We do not discriminate on the grounds of ethnic origin, disability, gender, marital status, sexuality, age, language, political and religious beliefs, social class or any other form of discrimination.



The Association is committed to monitoring data and use our completed Equalities Monitoring Form to inform how we shape our service delivery

Performance Management Framework

In addition to the annual submission of performance against the Annual Return on the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator, the Management Board will review and approve Key Performance Indicators and targets on an annual basis and outcomes will be monitored at quarterly meetings.

We will operate Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure the outcome of the void policy and also to track void work flow process efficiency. Annual targets will be set through the service planning process.

Targets and measures will be reviewed annually. We set processing targets for each step (sub-process) in our void workflow in addition to monitoring the KPIs as set out below:

- The number of voids and re-lets
- Tenancies not sustained under 12 months
- Reason for terminations
- Average days to re-let including maintenance periods
- Percentage of rent loss as a proportion of income
- Letting performance by timescale

This policy will be reviewed every 3 year or earlier if deemed necessary due to legislative or other changes.



Appendix 1

Works	Minimum Standard
General Cleanliness	The house will be cleared of furniture, carpets, and belongings/rubbish, unless it is agreed that the new tenant wishes to take over responsibility for any remaining items. Floors, surfaces, sanitary ware, woodwork kitchen units and worktops should be clean. Attics, basements, and outbuildings will be clear from rubbish.
Garden Areas	Gardens will be free of rubbish and grass cut if required. Paths to and from front and back door will be checked to ensure safety, fencing checked to ensure in good condition
Electrics	An electrical safety test will be completed, and a copy of the certificate will be presented to the new tenant on sign-up. Any electrical alterations or non-standard fittings will be removed unless they comply with the current regulations. Where this happens, the costs may be recharged to the former tenant.
Gas	A certified gas safety check must be undertaken. Where gas supply is to a gas cooker the pipework will be checked and capped off safely. Where there is no power to affect a live gas safety test, the gas supply will be capped, and a visual check completed. A live test will be arranged when the new tenant sets up their utility accounts.
Energy Performance Certificates	We will provide new tenants with an Energy Performance Certificate. We will also provide information about energy efficiency and how tenants can make best use of their home e.g., preventing condensation.
Gas/Electric Cooking	We will provide an electric cooking facility. We will remove cookers that are left by out-going tenants and safely cap off a gas cooking facility
Smoke Alarm	We will provide a functional smoke alarm to an LD2 standard. The smoke alarm(s) and carbon monoxide alarm(s) will be tested as part of the electric safety check.
Water Supply	During the winter months or severe cold spells, we will drain down void properties. We will ensure that the stopcock is accessible. We will follow best practice in preventing the risk of Legionella
Windows	All windows will be fully operational and checked for safety.
Front Door	Minimum mortice and Yale timber door, or security lock on double glazed door. Letterbox and back flap on all front doors. Check security and free from draughts or water ingress.



Works	Minimum Standard
Back Door	Minimum mortice or security lock on double glazed door. Check for security and draughts/water ingress.
Internal Pass Doors	All pass doors should be intact and operating properly. Bathroom doors will have a locking device. We will remove glass or non-standard doors that do not comply with British standards.
Floors	All loose and missing floorboards to be re-secured/replaced. Floor surface to be even to allow carpets to be laid.
Skirting and Facings	Missing or badly damaged skirting/facings will be replaced. Minor damage will be repaired.
Fitted Bedroom Cupboards	Will have a top shelf and hanging rail, space permitting and a functioning door.
Hall Cupboards	Functioning door and a shelf, space permitting.
Kitchen Units	Fully fitted Kitchen, to meet Scottish Housing Quality Standard. All kitchen units to be thoroughly checked and hinges replaced or adjusted where necessary. Damage fittings to be replaced. Work surfaces free from damage.
Medical Adaptations	All medical adaptations should be inspected to ensure that they are fully operational and meet with the needs of the incoming tenant. Where a small removable adaptation (i.e., grab rails) is not required by the new tenant, it will be removed after re-let.
Bathroom Suite	Fully functioning Bath, WHB, WC, Ceramic Cistern and WC Seat with functional taps and plugs. Each component of the bathroom will be inspected. New tenants will be advised of any planned maintenance replacements.
Shower Unit	Electric showers either over bath or stand-alone units will be tested as part of the void electric test. Over bath showers may be disconnected and removed if not up to current electrical safety standards. Stand-alone shower units will have a functioning tray, shower screen or curtain provided. A medically adapted shower may be removed if it does not meet a new tenant's requirements.
Decoration	Decoration is a tenant responsibility. We may offer a re-decoration allowance or instruct re-decoration work if the décor is in poor condition or may lead to a refusal. A decorating allowance per room will be assessed in accordance with the allowances set.

