

Southside

HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Void Management Policy
Updated May 2014

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Void Management Policy

Policy Owner: Housing Manager

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Section 1:

Introduction/Background:

- 1.1 Southside Housing Association originally registered as a social landlord (RSL) in 1971 and operates in the south west of Glasgow. The Association owns 2015 general needs houses located in four areas in the Southside of the city including: Cardonald, Halfway, Pollokshields, and Shawlands.
- 1.2 Similar to other landlords, the Association has a turnover in its housing stock as tenancies come to an end and new ones are created. It is inevitable that from time to time this will result in some properties being empty or 'void' for a period of time.
- 1.3 The way in which void properties are managed has significant consequences for the Association in terms of financial resources, as well as the service to outgoing and incoming tenants and the overall management of the estate.
- 1.4 This policy will set out Southside Housing Association's approach to managing tenancy ends and properties that become void as a result.

Section 2:

Aims and Objectives:

- 2.1 To adhere to statutory and contractual obligations in relation to processing tenancy terminations, maintaining void properties, monitoring demand and letting properties.
- 2.2 To adhere to good practice and to the Scottish Government Social Housing Charter outcomes 4 and 13 which state that: -

- **Outcome 4 Quality of Housing:**

“Tenants homes as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.”

This standard describes what landlords should be achieving in all their properties. It covers all properties that social landlords let, unless a particular property does not have to meet part of the standard. Beyond SHQS, landlords should be looking for cost-effective ways of achieving higher energy-efficiency standards for their properties, to provide warmer homes for their tenants and help to meet climate change targets.

• **Outcome 13 Value for Money:**

“Tenants, owners and other 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. It includes minimising the time houses are empty; managing arrears and all resources effectively; controlling costs; getting value out of contracts; and giving better value for money by increasing the quality of services with minimum extra cost to tenants, owners and other customers.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has proposed a range of indicators to monitor landlords’ achievement of the Charter outcomes and standards. This information will be obtained from landlords’ through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) which replaces the APSR (Annual Performance Statistical Return) that will be sent to SHR in May of each year from 2014.

(Appendix 1 attached outlines the Charter performance indicators against which social landlords will be measured for voids management under the standard on ‘Quality of Housing’.)

(Appendix 2 attached outlines the performance indicators for the outcome on ‘Getting Good Value from Rents and Service Charges’.)

- 2.3 To minimise financial losses resulting from properties being void.
- 2.4 To ensure that tenants are aware fully aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to giving notice of tenancy ends and the condition in which the property must be left.
- 2.5 To keep void properties in a safe and well kept condition for the protection of tenants, the property and general appearance of the area.
- 2.6 To bring void properties to a lettable standard as quickly as possible.
- 2.7 To have systems in place for the prompt re-letting of void properties.
- 2.8 To identify factors leading to high void turnover and difficult to let stock and develop appropriate strategies to address these issues.
- 2.9 To monitor our performance continually and to consult with tenants regarding performance and policy and to amend our policy and practice in the light of this.

Section 3:

Void Management

- 3.1 The Policy for Void Management cannot be seen in isolation, and must work in conjunction with the Association's Allocation Policy, Nomination Agreements, Tenancy Agreements and Void Procedures.

The aim of the Association is to allocate all tenancies fairly, efficiently and within set deadlines, and without discrimination on any grounds. To achieve this aim, the Association will ensure that we minimise the length of time a property lies vacant by allocating the property within set targets.

Tenancy end by Formal Notification

- 3.2 The Association reinforces at every opportunity the importance of the tenant giving 28 days notice that the tenancy is going to end. This begins at the tenancy sign up, and information is also contained within the Tenant Handbook and periodically in newsletters.
- 3.2 The 28 day notice of termination of tenancy must be made in writing to the Association and signed by any tenants, joint tenants and spouses where appropriate.
- 3.3 Where less than 28 days written notice is provided, the Association will take the termination date as being 28 days from when notice is received, unless the property can be reallocated before this time, thus minimising rent arrears.
- 3.4 Information will be provided confirming the correct procedure that should be followed to meet the contractual obligations of the tenancy agreement.
- 3.5 Housing staff will arrange to visit the property during the notice period to assess the repair and decoration standard and discuss any other matters relating to the tenancy such as the rent account or qualification to the Right to Repair Compensation Scheme. Details of this discussion will be sent to the outgoing tenant.
- 3.6 Outgoing tenants will always be encouraged to provide on-going contact details in the event that the Association requires getting in touch after keys are handed in.
- 3.7 The process to reallocate a property begins as soon as termination notification is received. In certain circumstances, with agreement of the outgoing tenant, repairs may be completed or accompanied viewings with prospective tenants may take place during the notice period.

Section 4:

Tenancy End by Abandonment:

- 4.1 From time to time, tenants leave their home with no intention of returning and fail to advise the Association. This is known as abandoning a property. The

Association has a separate procedure on abandonment to provide guidance to staff on how to deal with such situations.

- 4.2 Where the Association has reason to believe that a property has been abandoned, relevant checks will be made to confirm the position. The nature of these checks will be dependent on the individual circumstances of the case but may include investigations with neighbours, family, hospital, social work services or prison.
- 4.3 Where investigations conclude that a property has been abandoned, a legal notice will be hand delivered to the address of the property advising the tenant that that the house is considered to be unoccupied and that if the tenant has intentions of occupying it as their home, they must advise the Association in writing within 28 days from the date of the notice.
- 4.4 The notice also advises that if there are personal belongings within the property, they must be removed within 28 days from the date of the notice or they will be disposed of unless the value exceeds the costs of storing for 6 months plus any rent arrears if applicable.
- 4.5 Where necessary, the dwelling may be subject to various safety precautions in order to protect the Association's property
- 4.6 If the tenant has not contacted the Association at the end of the 28 day period, a second notice will be served on the 29th day, thus terminating the tenancy and resulting in the locks being changed
- 4.7 If belongings are found in the property, the Association is bound in terms of the legislation to act in the following way;
 - Take an inventory and photographs of the goods.
 - Store the goods if, in the Association's opinion, the value of the goods is equivalent to storage costs plus any rent arrears. Otherwise, they may be disposed of
 - If after 6 months in storage the goods are not collected, the Association will take an inventory and may dispose of the goods.
 - If at any time, the tenant wishes to take possession of the goods, the storage costs must be paid in advance
- 4.8 The Association will maintain a register of all abandoned properties. Properties will remain on the register for 5 years and will be available for public inspection on request.

Section 5:

Tenancy End by Death

- 5.1 The Associations policy and procedures on succession deals in detail with how succession requests are processed. The Association's procedure on the death of a tenant provides guidance to staff on how to deal with such situations.
- 5.2 When we receive notification of a tenant's death, without succession taking

place, a period of up to **two weeks** will be allowed for the house to be cleared. Depending on the individual circumstances of the case, and at the discretion of the Association, this period may be extended by a maximum of a further two weeks.

- 5.3 The tenancy will officially end upon the date of death of a tenant. Rights to housing benefit entitlement normally end on the death of a tenant. The Association has the discretion to claim the tenant's estate for the period in which the clear out of the property takes place.
- 5.4 In the majority of tenant deaths, the Association are advised of the death by the next of kin who take responsibility for all necessary arrangements. They will be asked to produce a death certificate to establish the date of the tenancy end and the identity of the deceased.
- 5.5 The next of kin normally arranges to clear the property of furniture and personal effects. The association has the discretion to assist by clearing out items of furniture where disposal is requested.
- 5.6 In the event of no next of kin coming forward, the Association will work with other departments to actively trace a next of kin. Police Scotland will be the main partner in this case.
- 5.7 If no next of kin can be identified, Police Scotland will liaise with the Local Authority who has a legal obligation to arrange and cover the cost of a funeral.
- 5.8 The Procurator Fiscal is likely to become involved in the case of a sudden, suspicious, accidental or unexplained death. They will also make preliminary enquiries on behalf of the Queens and Lord Treasurers Remembrance (QLTR) where no next of kin can be traced. (The Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrance is the Crown's representative in Scotland who deals with ownerless property.)
- 5.9 The Association will work with all relevant agencies as deemed necessary in each individual case. The QLTR will have the authority on the instruction of disposal of the household contents

Section 6:

Tenancy End by Eviction

- 6.1 The process for eviction is dealt with under the Association's policy and procedures for rent arrears. The tenancy termination date is the date that an eviction takes place. A similar approach will be taken for evictions resulting from 'Anti Social Behaviour' and this will be covered in the new 'Anti Social Behaviour' policy and procedures.

Section 7:

Other Tenancy Terminations

- 7.1 There are other circumstances where tenancy terminations will not result in

properties being classified as void. These are detailed below, and the processing of such tenancy ends will be dealt with under the Southside Housing Association's allocation policy and procedures;

- Mutual exchange
- Assignment / subletting
- Succession
- Joint to single tenancies/ single to joint tenancies/ abandonment of joint tenancies

Section 8:

Managing Voids and Lettable Standards

- 8.1 The Association manages its voids in a way that protects the property, neighbouring properties and residents. We work efficiently to carry out repair works and identify potential new tenants within the shortest possible timescale.
- 8.2 Where necessary we will arrange security, or take other precautionary safety measures, of a property where it is deemed at risk. This will be done when we are satisfied the house is no longer occupied or at the point keys are made available to us.
- 8.3 If keys are not returned in line with the tenancy termination date, rent will be charged until the keys are handed in or the association is forced to gain access. Legal advice will be sought in these cases.
- 8.4 We will carry out a full assessment of the repair condition of the property and order work appropriate to bring the house up to the Association's lettable standard. This inspection will be carried out as soon as keys are available.
- 8.5 We will assess the quality of the decoration of the outgoing tenant and establish any potential entitlement to assist with decoration.
- 8.6 We will aim to carry out all repair work within a maximum timescale of 5 working days. We will post inspect the quality of work carried out in void properties in every instance to ensure the quality of workmanship is acceptable to the Association.
- 8.7 We will ensure copies of gas, electric and energy performance certificates are available to issue to new tenants.
- 8.8 We will publicise our lettable void standard and ensure every prospective tenant is issued with a copy before they make a decision on whether or not to accept the offer of a tenancy.
- 8.9 During the void period, housing/concierge staff will be responsible for ensuring that weekly visual inspections of the exterior of the property take place. Any security, which has been tampered with or vandalised will be rectified immediately.

Section 9:

Letting the Property

9.1 Southside Housing Association's Allocation Policy details how it will allocate its void properties. New tenants will be liable for rental payments from their date of entry and the property will be habitable from that date.

9.2 Staff will carry out a settling in visit within 6 weeks from the tenancy start date to ensure the void property is fully occupied.

Section 10:

Records Complaints and Reporting:

10.1 Computer records will be maintained up to date to show details of our inspections, findings, outcomes and all other associated void management work.

10.2 Wherever possible we will deal with void management complaints "on the spot". Where this can't be achieved we aim to deal with any non urgent complaints within 5 working days. Where matters are likely to take longer to investigate, we will aim to resolve within 20 working days in line with our complaints procedure.

10.3 The Neighbourhood Sub-committee will receive reports on:

- Rent lost due to void properties (on a rental period basis) using the calculation as defined in the Scottish Social Housing Charter Guidance. (See Appendix 2 Void Loss)
- Turnover of stock and numbers of lettable voids (on a rental period basis)
- Offers of housing made including reasons for refusal (on a monthly basis)
- Average relet times of void properties (on a rental period basis) Spend on void properties (via quarterly management accounts)
- Ad hoc reports on any pertinent issues relating to difficult to let property
- Percentage of Tenants satisfied with their home when moving in. (See Appendix 1 Part 4.3)

Section 11:

Training Review and Distribution:

11.1 The Association is committed to training and developing staff and committee members to their full potential in order to deliver a high quality of service in all areas.

11.2 This Policy will be approved by the Association's Management Committee. It will be reviewed on a 3 yearly cycle. The review will incorporate changes in legislation, complaints, comments and feedback from customers.

11.3 This policy will be made available to every employee and committee member and will be made freely available to any tenant or interested party.

**Appendix 1:
Southside Housing Association
Voids Policy**

Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance Indicators – Voids Management
Housing Quality and Maintenance:

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| <p>Standard 4: Quality of Housing</p> <p>SHQS - To monitor landlords' progress towards achieving the SHQS by April 2015 and continuing to meet it thereafter.</p> <p>SAP - Energy efficiency is of considerable importance to tenants because of heating costs; the SAP rating is closely related to the expected costs to a typical tenant of keeping their home comfortable and warm.</p> <p>Satisfaction with <u>standard</u> of home on moving in: The number of new tenants in the year to 3103YY who indicated satisfaction with the standard of their home on moving in divided by the number who responded to the survey.</p> <p>Satisfaction with <u>quality</u> of home: The number of tenants who indicated satisfaction with the quality of their home divided by the number who responded to the survey. Quality of home is defined as – quality/standard to which the home is repaired and maintained</p> | <p>Charter Indicators:</p> <p>4.1 Percentage of properties meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).</p> <p>4.2 Percentage of properties at or above the NHER or SAP ratings specified in element 35 of the SHQS.</p> <p>4.3 Percentage of tenants satisfied with the standard of their home when moving in.</p> <p>4.4 Percentage of <u>existing</u> tenants satisfied with the quality of their home.</p> |
| <p>Other indicators reporting on same outcome/standard: Outcome 6 - Estate Management</p> | <p>6.3 Number of formal <u>offers refused</u> in the last year and reason for refusal.</p> |

Appendix 2:

Southside Housing Association Voids Policy

Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance Indicators – Voids Management
Getting Good Value for Rents and Service Charges:

| Standard 13: Value for Money | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Satisfaction: The number of tenants and other service users, who responded to your latest comprehensive satisfaction survey indicating satisfaction with the services they receive for the rent/charges applied, divided by the number of tenants responding to the survey.• Void Loss: The amount of rental income lost for all periods when properties were empty during the previous year• Re-lets: For all properties re-let in the previous year, the average length of time taken to re-let. | <p>Percentage of tenants and other service users satisfied with services received for the rent/charges made by the landlord.</p> <p>Charter Indicator 34: Percentage of rental income lost through empty properties in the last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Total amount or rent due for the reporting year.(ii) Total amount of rent lost through properties being empty in the reporting year. <p>Charter Indicator 35: Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Total no. of properties re-let in the reporting year.(ii) Total no. of calendar days properties were empty. |