



Cloch Housing Association

Empty Home (Void) Management

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Equalities Impact Assessment Required	No
Link to other policies	Tenant's Handbook, Estate Management, Death of a Tenant, Allocations, Legal Action & Eviction, Repairs, Rechargeable Repairs, Abandonment Policy & Procedure
Consultation	Customer Advisory Panel
Need for Procedure	Yes

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Empty Home (Void) Management Policy aims to ensure that the Association allocates all our empty (void) properties as quickly as possible and minimises rent loss because of properties being empty. Every property that we allocate should be let in accordance with our Inverclyde Common Housing Register Allocation Policy and should meet our Lettable Standard (see Appendix 1).
- 1.2 On request, the Association will provide translations of all our documents, policies and procedures in various languages and other formats such as on a computer storage device, or in large print, Braille etc. and you can obtain these by contacting the Association's offices.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The Association will re-let void properties as soon as possible to ensure we are:
- Being efficient and proactive in fulfilling our legal obligations as a landlord;
 - Ensuring that tenants fulfil their legal obligations in relation to their tenancy agreement;
 - Accelerating void turnaround;
 - Minimising void rent loss;
 - Ensuring that staff are appropriately trained so that they have the appropriate skills to deal with issues that arise;
 - Monitoring and reviewing void management issues and intervening as appropriate;
 - Prevent further deterioration of a property through being unoccupied; and
 - Reduce the possibility of vandalism and theft.
- 2.2 This Void Management Policy is to be read in conjunction with the Void Management Procedure and the Housing Management System guide. This policy will be implemented by both the Housing Services and Property Services sections.

3. LEGAL BACKGROUND AND COMPLIANCE

- 3.1 In terms of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the Scottish Housing Regulator has identified key indicators relevant to void management by which it will measure landlord performance, including the following:
- **Outcome 4: Quality of housing** “Tenants homes as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat Standard.

- **Outcome 11: Tenancy sustainment** “tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.”
- **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”

3.2 Key outcomes of operating an effective Empty Homes (Void) Management Policy include:

- Ensuring that properties are well maintained, safe, secure and in line with the SHQS;
- Ensuring that properties are warm, insulated, fuel efficient and compliant with EESSH;
- Optimising customer satisfaction with service delivery; and
- Delivering value for money.

3.3 We will comply with all relevant legislation and associated regulations, including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, 2001, 2010 & 2014; and
- The Scottish Social Housing Charter.

Our tenancy agreement underpins the roles and responsibilities of both landlord and tenant when a property is to be vacated (e.g. giving notice, leaving the house in reasonable condition etc.) It is a condition of the Scottish Secure and Short Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreements used by the Association that all properties should be wind and watertight, safe and secure, which also applies to void properties.

Our Empty Home (Void) Management Policy is consistent with our:

- Global Action Plan;
- Operational Plan
- Standing Orders;
- Financial Regulations;
- Privacy Notice;
- Reactive Repairs Policy
- Asset Management Strategy;
- Health & Safety Policy;
- Risk Management Strategy;
- Gas Maintenance Policy;
- Asbestos Management Policy;
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy;

- Electrical Safety Policy;
- Alterations & Improvements Policy;
- Energy Performance Certificates Policy;
- Water Systems & Legionella Policy;
- Estate Management Policy; and
- Inverclyde Common Housing Register Allocation Policy.

4. INFORMING AND INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS

- 4.1 The Association will promote our Empty Home (Void) Management Policy through our newsletter, website and when meeting tenants and applicants. Where we plan to make significant changes to the policy, we will consult tenants through our Customer Advisory Panel in line with our Customer Engagement Strategy.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 By having a detailed Empty Home (Void) Management Policy & Procedure, the Association minimises risks associated with this area of work. These documents highlight who has responsibility for the different stages in the Void Procedure and ensures that potentially hazardous elements such as gas and electricity are checked by registered tradesmen prior to letting a void property to a new tenant.
- 5.2 In addition, the risk of not having such a policy and procedure in place is that properties will be let out with the scope of legislation and the lettable standard which Cloch adopts. Should the Association fail to do this it puts our tenants and the organisation at risk both from a safety/physical perspective and a potential financial risk through penalties etc.
- 5.3 The risk of not adhering to this Policy & Procedure would result in delays in properties being relet, or properties becoming less desirable due to lower standards, all resulting in void loss which has a financial impact on the association.

6 PROCEDURES

- 6.1 The Association has a Void Management Procedure and a detailed 'how to use the Housing Management System for allocations/voids process' which is used to implement the policy. The procedure describes the processes involved from termination of a tenancy through to the allocation and letting of the property to a new tenant.

7 VOID MANAGEMENT PROCESS

- 7.1 Although there are distinct stages in the process, they will operate concurrently to expedite void turnaround and minimise void rent loss. A number of staff and contractors are involved in void management process and the processes that we adopt are set out in our Void Management Procedures

7.2 **Pre-termination Arrangements**

- 7.2.1 Tenants are 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. In some instances this is not also possible, for example, if a tenant abandons the property or in case where a tenant passes away.
- 7.2.2 Our 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, rechargeable repairs, etc. We expect outgoing tenants to leave their property cleared, cleaned and in good condition and to provide us with a forwarding address so that we can follow up any queries.
- 7.2.3 There will be 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. In these cases our aim will be to have keys returned or have locks changed as quickly and as practically possible so that the property can be relet without undue delay.

7.3 **End Of Tenancy**

- 7.3.1 Once a tenancy has been ended, we will:

- Update our tenancy and property records;
- Arrange for the void property to be inspected and necessary repairs instructed;
- Identify and pursue any former tenant arrears, rechargeable repairs, etc; and
- Allocate the property.

7.4 **Void Repairs**

- 7.4.1 We inspect all our empty properties to assess their condition, suitability for reletting and instruct any essential repairs.
- 7.4.2 All our properties require to be wind and watertight, safe and secure, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and energy efficient by achieving the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH).
- 7.4.3 Our Lettable Standard (see Appendix 1) sets out the type of repair work that will be carried out for a property to be ready for let and information on the level of decoration allowances, etc.
- 7.4.4 Planned programme renewals will generally be carried out when the property is occupied to coincide with the approved investment timetable in accordance with the Association's 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 and where this has been agreed by the Director of Property & Assets

7.5 Allocation

- 7.5.1 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 our Housing Allocation Policy.
- 7.5.2 Where possible, we will pre-allocate void properties. 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 a member of the Housing Services Team. However, there is discretion for us to carry out viewings prior to the previous tenancy ending.
- 7.5.3 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 be provided with a Tenancy Handbook and a settling in visit will be carried out, normally within 6 weeks of the tenancy start date.
- 7.5.4 The Association's Allocations Policy (Policy 028) details how the Association 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.

7.6 Decoration

- 7.6.1 Properties which are proving difficult to let because of poor decoration may be awarded a decoration allowance.

7.6.2 The Property Services Officer will advise the Housing Services staff member who will make this request. The allowance will consist of a gift card and will be £60 per room. It will not always be the case that every room requires major redecoration, and the number of rooms should be stated in the initial request.

7.6.3 Where a property has been identified as difficult to let and the internal decoration is poor, the Association may decide to decorate the property. This will be agreed between Housing and Property Services at the pre-termination inspection (or void inspection if a pre-termination inspection has not taken place) and flooring can be organised if this is required.

7.7 Minimum Lettable Standard

7.7 The Association has set a minimum re-lettable standard ([Appendix 1](#)). This standard goes beyond statutory gas inspections, provision of energy performance certificate, an electrical check and lock change. It provides clarity as to what will be done before the new tenant moves in. Tenants will be advised of our standard at the accompanied viewing stage.

7.7.2 Any repairs which have been identified as non essential may be carried out after the property has been let. These must be small minor repairs that would not prevent the new tenant from moving in or decorating. A list of repairs must be provided by Property Services before the property is allocated. This will allow the Housing Services Team to advise the new tenant at the sign up.

7.8 The Right To Compensation For Improvements

7.8 The Association recognises that some outgoing tenants may have the right to receive compensation for certain improvement works that have been carried out during their tenancy and an information leaflet is available to provide guidance on this matter.

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

8.1 Day to day performance in all aspects of void management is monitored using the Association's housing management software. This is an efficient and effective monitoring tool and allows for good joined up working between the sections and facilitates an overview of performance across all the areas associated with void management.

8.2 The Association will publish its performance on void management against key performance indicators through its Annual Report / Newsletters.

9. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

- 9.1 Appeals or complaints against our operation of this policy will be processed through the Association's complaints handling procedure, which is available at our office or on our website.

10. EQUALITIES COMMITMENT

- 10.1 Cloch Housing Association Ltd is committed to tackling discrimination on the grounds of sex or marital status, racial grounds, or grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language, social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions.
- 9.2 Cloch seeks to embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate any unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work.

11. POLICY REVIEW

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless amendment is prompted by a change in legislation, operational requirements or customer feedback. The Policy will be reviewed in consultation with tenants and staff.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Cloch HA Minimum Lettable Standard

Minimum Lettable Standard

Introduction

Cloch Housing Association (CHA) seeks to ensure that all empty houses that we allocate are in reasonable condition – this is called our 'Minimum Lettable Standard'.

Once notified that an empty house is becoming available, our aim is for new tenants to be able to move quickly and enjoy living in their new home.

We seek to minimise the time that our properties are empty and we therefore ensure that the moving tenants leave their homes in good condition. However void properties need to be inspected and potentially have a number of repairs carried out before a new tenant can move in.

As landlord, we must carry out a pre-tenancy check of each property to identify work required to meet the 'Minimum Lettable Standard'. We also have a duty to repair each property from the tenancy start date and throughout the tenancy.

Our starting point is to ensure that all our houses are safe, wind and watertight. CHA will also carry out those additional works that are essential for empty houses to reach this standard.

A property must meet the standard as follows:

- Possess a valid Gas Safety certificate, Electrical Safety Certificate, Compliant Fire detection system and valid Energy Performance Certificate.
- The property must be wind and watertight and in all other respects reasonably fit for people to live in.
- The structure and exterior (including drains, gutters and external pipes) must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.
- Installations for supplying water, gas and electricity and for sanitation, space heating and heating water must be in a reasonable state of repair.
- Any fixtures, fittings and appliances that the landlord provides under the tenancy must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.
- The property must have a satisfactory way of detecting fires and for giving warning of the event of a fire or suspected fire.

Details of our 'Minimum Lettable Standard' are listed below. If you have any queries, you should contact CHA's Property Services team.

General

All houses will be wind and watertight, safe and secure. Any additional works required to meet our standard will be noted and work will be programmed accordingly. Making the new tenant aware of all outstanding repairs at the sign up.

Cleanliness

Any rubbish, furniture, carpets, light shades, etc. left behind by the previous tenant will be removed, unless previously agreed to leave items behind for the incoming tenant. Loft areas will also be cleared. We will recharge outgoing tenants for this work where appropriate.

All cupboards, kitchen units and fittings will be cleared and washed down with disinfectant. All skirting, door facings, doors, windowsills and frames will be washed down with disinfectant.

All sanitary ware will be washed down with disinfectant.

A 'deep clean' will be authorised if a house is in extremely poor condition – this will be instructed after the void post inspection. In addition if a needle sweep is required this will be organised.

'Deep Clean' specification includes:

- sweep all floors;
- wash all floors;
- wash down paintwork;
- wash down doors, cupboards, electrical outlets and fittings;
- wash all kitchen units inside and out, worktops and sink units;
- clean expel air vents;
- clean wash hand basin, de-scale bath and toilet;
- wash down shower area;
- wash windows inside; and
- disinfect all rooms.

Decoration & plasterwork

Plasterwork will be repaired before the property is let, this will allow the new tenant to decorate. Small nail holes or other minor dents in plaster work will not be classified as plastering repairs and will be classed as decoration repairs, to be carried out by the incoming tenant if not excessive. Incoming tenants are expected to carry out all decoration work themselves. If decoration is not acceptable then a decoration voucher will be provided

Electrical

An electrical safety check will be carried out so that all switches, sockets and light fittings will be safe and fully operational, and all electric heating will be safe, functioning and meet the relevant legislation.

Cleaned and serviced mains operated smoke/heat detectors will be checked so that they are operational and compliant with relevant legislation.

All electrics will be checked and certified. The certified electrical safety check should be passed to the Property Services team upon completion of the void process and logged appropriately.

Gas

All houses with a gas supply to be checked and certified. A gas safety check will be carried out, so that all gas heating will be safe, functioning and meet the relevant standard.

Gas installations will be supplied with a current gas service certificate where there is a functioning meter. Otherwise, the gas supply will be capped at the meter until the tenancy is let.

All properties with a gas supply will be checked and certified. The certified gas safety check should be passed to the Property Services team upon completion of the void process and logged appropriately.

Where a gas fire is fitted this should be removed and the supply pipe capped under the floor and where necessary properties will be considered for a new heating system.

Carbon monoxide

All properties with a gas supply will have a carbon monoxide (CO) detector fitted and this will be checked and replaced where this is appropriate.

Asbestos

Our Property Services team record and maintain details of any asbestos in our properties on the asbestos register.

Where Artex or other suspect materials are identified, we will check the asbestos register. If it has not been checked previously and details recorded, we will instruct a specialist contractor to test it, report back and if necessary carry out any essential remedial works. If we need to remove asbestos we will use a licensed removal specialist, but following a risk assessment it might be appropriate to leave asbestos in place and monitor it at recommended intervals.

We will provide relevant information to incoming tenants in relation to the presence of asbestos.

Footpaths & steps

All footpaths and steps will be safe and level.

All doorsteps will be safe and secure.

Energy performance

An up-to-date Energy Performance Certificate will be provided and will be appropriately displayed within the property.

Kitchens

A fully functional kitchen will be provided with an appropriate number of units and worktops for the property type and size.

All kitchens will include a cooker connection point.

All kitchens will have adequate ventilation.

All kitchens will include a washing machine connection point.

Plugs and chains will be replaced if required.

Joinery – doors, facings, skirting boards, handrails, etc.

All internal pass doors will be functioning and undamaged.

All pass doors that require a fire rating will be functioning accordingly.
All external entrance doors will be secure, functioning and undamaged.
All door-facings and skirting boards will be serviceable.
A secure handrail will be fitted where there is an internal flight of stairs with more than three steps.

Windows

All windows will be checked and repaired, if necessary, to ensure that they are secure, functioning properly, serviceable and have window safety catches.

Plumbing

All plumbing will be functioning.
All disused pipes will be removed and any resulting damage to walls / floors repaired.
Water systems will be drained down during the winter months (usually end of December to beginning of January) when there is a risk of severe frost. Water supplies will be reinstated when the new tenant moves in.

Sanitary ware and bathing facilities

All sanitary ware will be fully functioning.
All sanitary ware will be free from holes or cracks that may cause water leakage or injury.
Plugs and chains will be replaced, if required.
All bathrooms with showers will have a replacement shower curtain and new shower head and hose fitted.

Rainwater goods

Rainwater goods will be free of obvious blockages or growth such as weeds, grass, etc.
Rot, dampness, condensation, etc.
All reasonable steps will be taken to identify and remedy dry rot, wet rot, rising or penetrating damp, condensation, etc.

Locks and keys

All cylinder barrels will be changed where a property is abandoned or a tenant is evicted.
At least two sets of keys will be provided to the tenant for their main entrance door/s.
Tenant will also receive a key/fob for each common entrance.

Gardens, drying areas, etc.

Any debris and rubbish in garden areas and bin stores will be removed. Outgoing tenants will be recharged for this work where appropriate.
Drying facilities will be provided (e.g. clothes poles or rotary driers) and will be functioning.

Grassed areas and hedges will receive a first cut if necessary.
Fencing will be inspected and repaired or replaced as appropriate.

New build properties

Snagging work will be completed in advance of the new tenant moving into a new build property. However where minor snagging work is incomplete, the new tenant will be notified and arrangements made for access so that the contractor can complete works as part of their defects liability.

Minor outstanding repairs

Properties may be let with minor repairs outstanding, provided that they do not prevent the new tenant from moving in and occupying the property safely. Where this happens, the new tenant will be provided with a list of outstanding repairs and agreement will be reached with the tenant on a convenient time for these minor repairs to be carried out.

Void turnaround time

The target void turnaround time is set out within our Key Performance Indicators. Targets are reviewed at least annually. Our expectation is for the majority of empty properties to be brought up to our 'Minimum Lettable Standard' and let within the target response time.

However, where we have an empty property in reasonable condition and where it is a property with strong housing demand. In these circumstances we will focus on carrying out only essential safety checks and scheduling any repairs to meet the 'Minimum Lettable Standard' after the new tenant moves in.

Review of the Lettable Standard

The Lettable Standard will be reviewed routinely within the context of the Empty Home (Void) Management Policy. New tenants should receive a settling in visit within 6 weeks after moving into their new tenancy and will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the 'Minimum Lettable Standard'.