Void Management Policy

H.06

Reviewed   29th September 2022

Date next due for review: September 2025

This policy document can be produced in various formats, for instance, in larger print or audio-format. It can also be translated into other languages, as appropriate.

Our equality and diversity policy statement describes our key equality commitments that we use to develop all organisational services; this includes employment services and services to tenants and other customers.

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to outline the way in which Pineview Housing Association will control and manage void properties within its stock.

1.2 Our primary source of income is provided from rents.

1.3 This Policy therefore outlines how we deal with void properties to ensure that rent loss is minimised and the most effective use is made of the housing stock in order to meet housing need.

1.4 This Void Management Policy is supplemented by detailed working procedures which will be used by staff in implementing the policy.

2. Policy Aims and Objectives

2.1 The overall aim of this policy is to provide good management of void properties and limit void periods in order to maximise rental income, provide a quality service and to meet housing need.

2.2 The specific objectives of this policy are: -

- To make the most effective use of the housing stock and resources to meet housing need.

- To allocate properties timeously that will meet the Association's lettable standard.

- To ensure effective, efficient and accountable management of vacant properties.

- To enable effective monitoring and reporting of void management and service delivery.

- To ensure tenants are aware of their end of tenancy obligations.

- To prevent end of tenancy arrears (including rechargeable repairs) where possible.

- To comply with legal duties, regulatory requirements and good practice requirements.

- To ensure that rent loss and average relet time is minimised, as determined by comparison with our year on year performance and the performance of other comparable social landlords.

- To provide a clear statement for staff and tenants of the level of service and standards to which we will work.

- To achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction with the condition of properties at the beginning of tenancy and with the void management process overall.

- To involve tenants in reviewing the effective delivery of this policy by seeking feedback.

- To create sustainable tenancies and provide properties that are safe and attractive to applicants at the time of offer.

3. Effective Working Practices

3.1 Void management involves tenants, housing services staff as well as the Association's repairs contractor(s). We will seek to achieve clear and effective communication and joint working between all parties involved in the process to deliver the best possible service.

4. Best Value Principles

4.1 Our approach to void management will reflect best value principles. For example:

- We will establish a re-let standard for empty properties, so that an appropriate balance is struck between minimising expenditure and establishing reasonable standards for customers.

- We will involve customers in setting standards e.g. by discussing with them policy matters such as the re-let standard.

- We will pre-allocate properties before they become empty, whenever possible.

- We will set targets for each aspect of dealing with empty properties and monitor our performance in achieving these.

- We will compare our performance with that of other comparable landlords.

- We will aim to achieve continuous improvement in our performance and in the standard of service offered to customers.

5. Legal and Regulatory Framework.

5.0 Pineview Housing Association will have full regard to the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, good practice guidance and legislation in its approach to managing void properties.

5.1 Legal Requirements:

This policy and its implementation will reflect our statutory and contractual obligations. This includes (but is not an exhaustive list):

- The Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, 2010 & 2014

- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998

- The Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2015

- The UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018

- The Equality Act 2010

- The Human Rights Act 1998

5.2 Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) and the Scottish Social Housing Charter

5.2.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) was set up to operate as an independent regulator who is directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

5.2.2 The SHR monitors, assesses, compares and reports on social landlords' performance of housing activities.

5.2.3 It requires landlords to collect and provide key information on their performance in relation to achieving the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) outcomes and standards.

5.2.4 Information on the SHR and the SSHC can be found at www.scottishhousingregulator.co.uk

5.2.5 The following SSHC outcomes and standards are directly relevant to this abandonment policy:

Charter Outcome 4 - Quality of Housing

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:
- Tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) when they are allocated; are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair; and also meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESSH) by December 2020.

Charter Outcome 5 – Repairs, maintenance and improvements

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:
- Tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

Charter Outcome 6 – Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure as far as reasonably possible that:
- Tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.

Charter Outcome 11 – Tenancy sustainment

Social landlords ensure that:
- 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.

Charter Outcome 13 – Value for money

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:
- Tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay. (It includes minimizing the time houses are empty)

6. Definition of a Void Property

6.1 Pineview Housing Association defines a void property as a property that has no tenant for a period of time. This occurs:

- Where a tenant has formally terminated the tenancy by written notice.

- On the death of a tenant (where no right of succession exists)

- By abandonment of a tenancy.

- By eviction where the Association has completed the relevant court action.

- On completion of a new build property from the development programme.

6.2 Properties withdrawn from management due to major repair or demolition are not covered by this policy. Such properties will be withdrawn from management only following approval by the Management Committee.

7. Effective Void Management

7.1 Termination of Tenancies

We will:

- Require 28 days' notice (in writing) from tenants who wish to end their tenancy.

- Provide a termination of tenancy form for tenants to complete and which records relevant information e.g. date of termination, reasons for leaving, forwarding address.
- will commence void management procedures as soon as the notice of tenancy termination is received.

- Have procedures covering the circumstances in which notice period **may** be waived, such as: death of tenant, hospitalisation/permanent care and internal transfer.

7.1.1 We have clear procedures for dealing with properties that appear or are reported to have been abandoned and/or the keys for a tenancy have been received but without written notice being provided.

7.1.2 Where a written notification is not obtained, the Association's Abandonment procedures will be implemented to allow for the tenancy to be legally brought to an end.

7.1.3 We will make tenants aware of their responsibilities at end of tenancy in a number of ways including:

- The tenancy agreement

- The tenants' handbook

- The termination of tenancy letter sent in response to notice being given

7.2 Inspection and Repairs to Properties

7.2.1 Pre termination Inspection

This provides us with an opportunity to clarify issues relating to end of tenancy procedures with the outgoing tenant.

We will:

- Where possible carry out an initial pre termination inspection before the outgoing tenant vacates the property. This is to give time to identify any repairs, tenant alterations or rechargeable repairs. Repairs will be identified by using our minimum lettable standard as a guide.

- advise the tenant of the need to leave the property in a clean and tidy condition, ensuring all furniture and personal effects are removed prior to handing in the keys.

- verify and confirm the number of keys to be returned with the tenant. In order to avoid delays in the void repair and letting process we will ensure that we obtain keys from the outgoing tenant on or before the termination date.

- advise the tenant that keys returned after the termination date will result in additional rent being charged.

- advise the tenant to ensure any rent/rechargeable repair payments are made in advance of the termination date.

7.2.2 End of Tenancy

- A full inspection will be carried out to ensure that the property is empty, secure and has been left in a satisfactory condition. This will normally take place within 1 working day of the keys being handed in at the end of tenancy date.

- The inspection will identify the repairs required to bring the property up to statutory requirements and also meet the Associations' minimum lettable standard. Reference will be given to the Financial Regulations when raising any works order to ensure that staff are adhering to the association's authorization levels.

- The property and safety checks specified in our void management procedures will be completed.

- Any rechargeable repairs will be identified in accordance with our Rechargeable Repair Policy.

7.2.3 Void Repairs

- Repairs shall be recorded on a void inspection sheet by the staff member completing the full inspection / SDM computer system.

- We will set demanding response times for our contractor(s) who carry out void repairs and safety checks. We will monitor their compliance with these.

- A post inspection will be carried out following the completion of repairs in all void properties before re-letting. This is to ensure that the contractor has completed all work to a satisfactory standard.

7.3 Selection and Allocation Process

7.3.1 We will:

Begin the process of selecting prospective tenants in accordance with our Allocations Policy as soon as possible after we receive notice of termination or otherwise become aware that a property will be available for letting.

- Pre- allocate properties wherever possible before the outgoing tenant vacates or before repairs are done.

- Set clear timescales for responding to an offer, viewing a property and re-selecting on offer refusals.

- Take action to minimise the number of refusals by informing the applicant of the void repair procedure and being sensitive to applicants' areas of choice.

Carry out accompanied viewing of properties.
- record and monitor the number of properties refused and the reasons for refusal.

7.4 Sign Up and New Tenant Procedures

7.4.1 We will:

Ensure sign ups of the Tenancy Agreement and the delivery of appropriate information to the tenant is arranged with the minimum of delay after offer acceptance.

- arrange the removal of void security as appropriate on the date of the tenancy commencement (if applicable)

- carry out a settling in visit within 6 weeks of the date of entry to ensure the tenant has a full understanding of their tenancy obligations and to check for any problems being experienced. We will survey tenant satisfaction with the void management process as part of the settling in visit.

7.5 Void Strategy

7.5.1 We will:

- Monitor the level of demand for our properties in order to identify and plan for the impact of any trends developing.
- Introduce a letting action plan to identify and address potential areas or properties of low demand in advance of them becoming vacant.

- Where appropriate seek Management Committee approval for a change of use, re design of certain properties or a change in void management service provision.
- Agree nomination/homeless referral arrangements, including timescales, with Glasgow City Council and other agencies, as applicable.
- Enhance links with other relevant agencies and partners as appropriate.

8. Training and Development.

8.1 The training requirements of Management Committee and staff will be regularly assessed to ensure that they have the necessary skills to effectively implement and monitor this Void Management Policy.

9. Performance Monitoring

9.1 We are committed to continuously improving void management practice. We understand that effective monitoring and reporting is fundamental to the process of evaluating and reviewing performance.

9.2 Operational targets will be set for monitoring performance for each aspect of the void management process.

9.3 We will provide reports to Management Committee comparing performance and against targets as applicable:

- Percentage of rent due lost through properties being empty during the last year.
- Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year.
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with the standard of their home when moving in.
- Percentage of tenancy offers refused during the year.
- Percentage of lettable houses that became vacant in the last year.
- Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year, by source of let.

9.4 We will conduct exit interviews and monitor and report on the information provided and any patterns arising from these.

9.5 We will also benchmark our performance against that achieved by other comparable landlords.

10. Involving Service Users

10.1 Pineview Housing Association is committed to receiving regular feedback from service users about our performance to help improve service delivery.

10.2 For void management services we will do this in the following ways:
- Obtaining feedback from new tenants about their satisfaction with the property at the start of their tenancy and through subsequent settling in visits.

- Monitoring comments and complaints from tenants and using these to improve our service delivery.

- Involving tenants in periodic reviews about wider policy issues e.g. void relet standards.

- Actively seeking feedback from residents via newsletters, annual reports and through Management Committee and Customer Forum meetings.

11. Links with Other Policies

11.1 Pineview Housing Association recognises that the effective operation of this policy is dependent on policies and performance in a variety of service areas, some of these are:

Allocations Policy
Abandonment Policy
Estate Management Policy
Anti Social Behaviour Policy
Repairs & Maintenance Policy
Rechargeable Repairs Policy
Our Minimum Lettable Standards
Complaints Policy

12. Risk Management

12.1 Risk can arise from this policy as a result of:

- Financial risk through potential failure to ensure sufficient income is collected to cover operating costs due to void rent loss and high level of repair costs.

- Non-compliance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes and performance indicators.

12.2 Given the importance of these risks the effective management of this policy is vital.

13. Equality and Diversity

13.1 Our core values include providing a fair and equal service for all people and this is detailed in our Equality and Diversity Policy. Our approach to managing void properties will reflect that commitment.

14. Complaints/Appeals Process

14.1 Anyone who is not happy /satisfied with the service they have received as a result of this policy has a right to complain. Please see the Association's Complaints Policy for details on how to do this.

15. Review/Consultation

15.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless amendment is prompted by a change in legislation or monitoring/reporting reveals that a change in policy is required sooner.

15.2 Procedures and working methods may be altered more frequently where this is needed.

15.3 The Association's Management Committee will assess and review targets relating to void management on an annual basis to ensure their appropriateness.

15.4 Policy review will involve consultation with our tenants, our Resident and Customer Forum and any other relevant stakeholders.

15.5 We will take account of any views or representations in revising our policy and service provision to assist in the development of effective service delivery.

15.6 We will regularly publish information about our performance in managing voids through annual reports or other appropriate methods.

15.7 We will also seek feedback from tenants about the operation of this policy through regular satisfaction surveys and any other appropriate methods.