

**VOIDS POLICY**



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**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

July 2008

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### *EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY*

The minimum standard expected of social landlords is:

'RSL's should maximise the use of available stock through the control of empty properties' (Housing Corporation Performance Standards Dec.1997).

The Associations target for total homes vacant and available for letting is no more than 1.8% with the National Average being 2.6%.

Increases in the numbers of empty property and the amount of time they are vacant can:

- impact on revenue stream
- reduce the overall appearance of an estate/property
- add to the decline of an area
- attract higher levels of vandalism
- cause squatting

In order to minimise these effects following strategy is being pursued.

#### **1.1 Proactive Approach**

Whilst it is inevitable that at any one time stock will be empty e.g. major repair, tenants leaving etc. a proactive approach can reduce void levels. Four areas of action make up the present strategy adopted by the Association:

#### **1.2 Lettings Practice**

- performance monitoring to ensure that when notice of a property becoming void is received immediate actions are taken to relet it
- if the required 4 weeks notice has not been received a fast track arrangement is put into place to make offers and carry out any necessary repairs/cleaning
- an abandoned property procedure is in place to ensure possession is obtained in the optimum time but without the Association acting illegally
- monthly progress meeting between the Association and KHT Services to ensure all properties are repaired within target times
- Difficulties identified through weekly progress reports on each void property
- production of statistical information showing in detail the status of each void



### **1.3 Estate Management**

A high standard of environmental works is essential to maintain the external appearance of property. The Estate Services contract for cleaning window cleaning and landscape maintenance is delivered by KHT Services. This is monitored by the Association and residents to ensure services are delivered in accordance with specification.

### **1.4 Resident Communication**

Regular information is provided to tenants regarding their obligations in relation to terminating their tenancy and advice is given to them once notice has been received.

Accommodation is 'sold' to prospective tenants by accompanied viewings and information relating to the property and the area will be given to prospective tenants by the Association. Reasons for properties being refused are recorded and analysed in order for any corrective action to be taken and reduce the risk of further refusal.

### **1.5 Longer Term Considerations**

Certain property types owned by the Association are now considered low demand e.g. bedsits. Innovative solutions will be considered to increase demand such as: converting adjacent properties, fitting mezzanine sleeping areas in high ceiling properties or dividing large combined living and sleeping areas into separate rooms.

Other methods used to minimise void levels include:

- increasing the specification of work on voids considered hard to let e.g. bed sits
- providing decoration grants
- offering furniture packages and/or carpets and blinds
- relating rent levels to letability

## **2 POLICY STATEMENT**

The Association's aim is to minimise the number of properties that are unoccupied and the period of time they remain so.

This statement provides guidance to Officers responsible for managing void properties.

### **2.1 The Critical Time**

This is the period between when a tenant ceases to occupy a property (and therefore stops paying rent) and when a new tenant takes up residence (and commences paying rent). The voids procedure is designed to put 'downward pressure' on it by ensuring all actions and activities are undertaken with speed and efficiency.

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### **2.2 Void Stages**

#### **A**

On identification of a future void property the Allocations and Supported Housing Team will notify KHT Services by e-mail. If possible the outgoing tenant will be advised that an inspection will take place before the end of the notice period. A standard form (end of tenancy) is also issued to the tenant to complete which includes details of how to return the keys. KHT Services should arrange to visit the property to carry out an inspection.

On return of the keys the voids spreadsheet is updated and keys passed to KHT Services immediately. KHT Services will advise the Association when the void work will be estimated to be complete. Information will be updated weekly on a spreadsheet and monthly void progress meetings will be held.

Concurrently the Allocations Officer will identify a new tenant either by advertising the property via a Choice Based Lettings Scheme, seeking a nomination from the appropriate Local Authority or matching the property to an applicant on the waiting/transfer list in line with lettings targets. Once a tenant is identified, an offer of accommodation will be made immediately.

#### **B**

KHT Services will undertake repairs required to meet the association lettable standard.

During the repair period and when safe to do so, keys should be made available to the Allocations Officer to enable accompanied viewing to take place. Information on the status of the void works will be provided by KHT Services to the Associations Repairs Contract Coordinator.

On completion of void work keys are returned to the Allocation and Supported Housing Team and the property marked as returned and ready to let.

If the estimated date of completion is passed the Repairs Contract Coordinator will discuss the reasons with KHT Services.

If a new tenant has not been identified and there is no one on the waiting/transfer list then other methods of marketing/advertising will be pursued.

### **2.3 Control of Keys**

Keys are returned to the Association and given to KHT Services for void inspection

Offer of accommodation made to applicant and advice obtained from KHT Services concerning estimated completion date for void.

An appointment is made with the applicant to view accommodation, ensuring a set of keys is available from KHT Services and that the property is in a viewable condition prior to completion of works.

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Keys are returned from KHT Services following completion of void works.

Arrangement is made for the applicant can sign up for the tenancy.

### **2.4 Keys Locating and Tagging**

When keys are returned to the Association following the termination of a tenancy they are given a green tag and passed to KHT Services with the void inspection request.

Information relating to the void date and date of the inspection request is entered onto the void spreadsheet.

Keys are retained by KHT for the duration of the void works unless a viewing is arranged by the Allocations Officer for which a set of keys will be provided.

The keys are returned to the Association upon completion of the void works and the property is inspected by the Repairs Contract Coordinator.

### **2.5 Lettings**

There is an important link between void periods and letability of property. The Empty Property Strategy has been prepared to deal with less popular stock.

### **2.6 Repairs and Maintenance**

The repairs contract details the procedure for dealing with voids with the principal driver being the minimisation of the 'critical time' period.

### **2.7 Commitments**

To administer all activities in the 'critical period' to optimum effect, including:

- Handle tenant's notices as a priority
- Conduct lettings processes efficiently
- Undertake void repairs quickly
- Ensure precise and accurate record keeping, especially relating to keys

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### 2.8 Repairs Contract

#### *VOID PROPERTY PROCEDURES*

The following procedures are to be followed when dealing with void properties:

In the case of Void Property Works the KHT Services may undertake pre inspections jointly with the Repairs Contract Coordinator. The Association shall provide KHT Services with a minimum 48 hours notice of a request to undertake any pre inspections

Void property works inspections will include the following specification;

- Collect keys
- Take meter readings
- Change lock barrels to front and rear doors
- Inspect dwelling against the Employer's void lettings standard
- Schedule works required against schedule of rates codes
- Take digital photographs of failed components, previous tenants contents, tenant damage of property etc
- Co-ordinate with gas testing contractor to enable gas tests to be undertaken, a minimum of 24 hours notice is to be given to the gas testing contractor
- Arrange for electrical tests to be undertaken
- Forward by email the schedule of works and digital photographs within 24 hours of completion of void inspection
- Categorise works into the following categories to define the response repair period for completion until return of keys and inform the Association of the anticipated date for completion

Category "1" Gas, electric tests, lock change, 'housewife's clean to lettable standard, plus works required up to a value, including contractor's percentage adjustment, of £500 – 7 calendar days

Category "2" As category "1" plus works required over a value, including contractor's percentage, adjustment of £500 and up to £1,000 – 14 calendar days

Category "3" As category "1" plus works required over a value, including contractor's percentage, adjustment of £1,000 and up to £1,500 – 21 calendar days

Category "4" As category "1" plus structural void work in excess of a value, including contractors percentage, adjustment of £1,500 or notifiable to the HSE – in excess of 21 calendar days

The Association may deliver works in a two phased approach. This is likely to consist of Essential Works (e.g. Health and Safety , clear and clean etc) being completed prior to the tenant moving in and non essential work including tenant choice being completed by appointment when the new tenants have signed the tenancy agreement and are about to or have moved in. The use of this two phase approach will be at the discretion of the Repairs Contract Coordinator and Allocations and Supported Housing Team Leader.

KHT Services will schedule void property works which may require sub scheduling into tenant

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recharge, insurance, or capitalised repairs. KHT Services will undertake the void property works including gas safety inspections, testing, and certification

The void property works will comprise any of the following;

- Survey of void dwellings to establish scope of works to achieve the Associations habitable and lettable standards.
- Undertaking lock changes which may include suiting for sheltered/support schemes
- Provision of void property screens and alarm systems if required
- Clearance of all previous tenants contents from dwellings including roof spaces, gardens and associated garages
- Initial cleaning of dwellings which may be in certain circumstances exceptionally dirty or subject to environmental hazards and pest control
- All trade works
- Change of tenant electrical checks, scheduling of works, undertaking of works including rewires and certification
- Co-ordination with the Associations asbestos testing, removal and encapsulation contractor
- Preparation of void dwellings for subsequent redecoration by tenants
- Undertaking fire insurance works
- Undertaking incoming tenants option works by appointment with new tenants in occupation
- Assisting in the reletting process by undertaking accompanied tenants visits etc
- Providing 24 hour emergency call out cover to void or prospective voids properties
- Final pre occupation clean of dwelling before hand over, including grass cutting etc
- Updating the Associations attribute, stock condition, HHSR and SAP energy rating data bases following completion of works to each void property

KHT Services will not return the keys to the Association until after a satisfactory joint post inspector with the Repairs Contract Coordinator

Providing all works are satisfactory and acceptable to the Repairs Contract Coordinator, KHT Services are required to return keys to the Association no later than 9.30 a.m. on the next working day, together with the relevant NICEIC and CORGI test and inspection certificates. Keys should not be returned on any day preceding a bank or public holiday or during the period 18 December to 2 January each year.

KHT Services shall provide the Repairs Contract Coordinator with a weekly report detailing all void properties, work outstanding and estimated date of completion and hold monthly progress meetings to discuss any issues

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### 2.9 Standard for New Lettings

The following safety checks will have been carried out.

- Electrical Installation
- Gas Installation
- Plumbing Installation
- Smoke Detectors (unless part of communal system, when serviced separately)
- Your gas appliances will be serviced on the commencement of your tenancy.

All fixtures and fittings will be fully operational.

- All Kitchens will have facilities for washing machine outlets including power point under work surface and isolating switch.
- The following number of electrical sockets will be installed as noted
- Working area of kitchen                      4 double
- Dining room    2 double
- Living room/area                                      4 double
- Double bedroom                                      2 double
- Single bedroom                                      2 double
- Hall    1 double
- Landing    1 double

All surfaces, fixtures and fittings will be cleaned.

You will be provided with two sets of house keys inclusive of window lock radiator and external gas/ electric meter cupboards keys as applicable.

Prior to commencement of the tenancy the garden will be maintained, if applicable.

A Tenant Information Card detailing location of stopcocks/ isolating controls etc. will be provided

Emergency Telephone Number to be located in cylinder cupboard and meter cupboards.

### **Cleaning of property**

All items to be removed from:

Loft  
Cellar  
Crawl Cupboard  
Airing Cupboard  
Store Cupboard  
External Stores  
Bin rooms/areas to be washed down

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### **Kitchen**

All kitchen units and sink to be cleaned and washed down inside and out pristine clean.

### **Bathrooms**

All ceramic items to be washed down internally and externally pristine clean. All tiled surfaces and floors to be washed down.

### **Windows**

All internal windows and mirrors to be washed down

### **General**

All rooms to be swept/ vacuumed.

All vinyl sheet flooring or similar to be cleaned (with water and detergent).

## **2.10 Void Decoration Allowances**

1. When inspecting the void property the Maintenance Surveyor will make a decision on whether a void decorating allowance is to be issued.
2. If a void decoration allowance is to be offered the Maintenance Surveyor will inform the Allocations and Support Team to enable them to inform prospective tenants and acquire the necessary vouchers.
3. The Following is the decoration allowance's schedule:

<b>Type of Accommodation</b>		<b>Decoration Allowance</b>
Bedsit	-	80.00
1 Bed Flat	-	120.00
2 Bed Flat	-	140.00
3 Bed Flat	-	160.00
1 Bed House	-	120.00
2 Bed House	-	140.00
3 Bed House	-	170.00
4 Bed House	-	200.00
5 Bed House	-	250.00
2 Bed Bungalow	-	140.00
3 Bed Bungalow	-	160.00

4. In certain circumstances residents may not be able to decorate their properties and consideration will be given to providing a contractor service (Labour only at the discretion of the Repairs Contract Coordinator or Asset Manager). In the event of there being a dispute over whether a property should be decorated or a decorating allowance issued the decision

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will be made by the Allocation and Supported Housing Team Leader, Repairs Contract Coordinator or in their absence the Asset Manager.

### 3 IMPLEMENTATION

The Operations Director will ensure that the Allocation and Support Team is adequately staffed and that workloads remain manageable to ensure that the service is delivered in accordance with this policy.

The Operations Director will ensure that there is a sufficient range of procedures in place that enable staff to be informed about how to deliver the Voids Policy in accordance with policy requirements.

The performance of the Voids Policy will be reviewed on a monthly basis in terms of its performance against targets, with recommendations for change being made where necessary.

The Asset Manager and Allocation and Supported Housing Team Leader will ensure that all officers act in accordance with the Voids Policy.

The Repairs Contract Coordinator and Allocation Officer will manage the Voids Policy on a day to day basis.

### 4 RESPONSIBILITY

Overall responsibility for implementation of this policy lies with the Director of Operations.

The Asset Manager and Allocation and Support Team Leader are responsible for the application of this policy, monitoring performance, identifying shortfalls and recommending actions to rectify situations as applicable.

Day to day operation of this policy is the responsibility of the officers identified within the Voids Policy contract managed by KHT Services.

### 5 CONSULTATION

The Association will consult every 3 years with the staff, outside agencies and benchmarking groups to promote continuous improvement and develop good practice in this policy.

Prior to making any changes to this policy the Association will consent and consider the view of:

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- All relevant staff
- Senior Management Team
- The Tenants' Forum
- Board of Management
- Residents, Tenants Groups, individual interested tenants
- All relevant outside agencies

## **6 REVIEW**

- 6.1 The Association will formally review its Allocations Policy on a 3 yearly basis, unless changes in legislation or regulation require an earlier review.
- 6.2 Findings and recommendations will be presented to the Association's Board of Management after the views of the Forum have been considered. A review team will carry out each review.
- 6.3 Progress reports will be made to the Board of Management and Forum, to enable monitoring against strategic aims and objectives and agreed performance indicators. Performance data will be included in the annual report to tenants.

## **7 TRAINING**

The Association will provide all staff responsible for implementing this policy with comprehensive training.

Training will be given to:

- New staff
- Existing staff on an annual basis as a refresher/update as required
- All relevant staff after change to policy/ legislation
- To relevant outside agencies
- Any other times as identified by the Operations Director, Team Leaders or Group Human Resources Director

## **8 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

The Association has the following relevant documents:

- Vulnerable Tenants Policy
- Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Complaints policy and procedures

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- Abandoned Tenancy Policy

### 9 POLICY REVIEW SUMMARY

Policy Title	Voids Policy
Dated Created	28 September 2008
Review Period	3 Yearly
Review Committee	Board of Management
Version	2
Authorised by	Board of Management
Date of last review	September 2008
Date of next review	September 2011