



ORE VALLEY HOUSING ASSOCIATION

THE MANAGEMENT OF VOIDS POLICY, PROCEDURES & WORK INSTRUCTIONS

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ORE VALLEY HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

Voids Policy

Policy Statement

Ore Valley Housing Association will seek to maximise rental income by ensuring that empty properties are allocated and re-let timeously through the development and implementation of appropriate procedures and work instructions.

The maximisation of income will be balanced against the need to present property for re-let which is in a reasonable state of repair and decorative order, or ensure that alternative arrangements have been made in consultation with the incoming tenant.

Ore Valley Housing Association is responsible for meeting the standards and outcomes set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC).

We are accountable to our tenants and other customers for how well we do, so we should ensure that our performance management and reporting systems:

- show how well we are achieving the outcomes;
- identify any areas where we need to improve; and
- enable us to report to our tenants, customers and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

This policy and the associated procedures have been developed with reference to the SSHC and the following specific standards:

Housing Quality

Social Landlords manage their business so that:

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.

Value for Money

Social Landlords manage all aspects of their business so that:

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 minimizing the time houses are empty; managing arrears and all resources effectively; controlling costs; getting value for money 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.

Risk Management

The procedures following this policy will include measures to mitigate the risks relating to the management of void properties, as listed in the current Risk Maps.

We will ensure that we re-let properties in a safe and habitable condition, complying with all current statutory legislation relating to our activities as a landlord and in particular with the regulations governing the completion of safety checks on gas and electrical installations and services.

Equal Opportunities

We will ensure that in implementing this policy and the supporting procedures we comply with our Equalities and Diversity Policy

Implementation and Review

The Housing Manager (HM) is responsible for ensuring that this policy and the procedures that support it are implemented when required.

The HM will report on our performance against current voids targets as part of the regular reporting arrangements.

The HM will ensure that the voids targets are reviewed annually and this policy at every 5 years.

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VOID Procedures

These procedures should be used in conjunction with the flow diagrams and working documents contained within the voids folder. A summary of responsibility is shown in [Appendix 1](#).

Notices for Termination

The notice required will normally be 28 days in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement. In exceptional circumstances, the Housing Officer should refer to the Housing Manager for a decision to set aside the need for full notice; although this should only occur in cases where there is good cause; e.g. an elderly person moving into residential care, sheltered housing, someone fleeing extreme violence or harassment; or a tenant moving out-with the area to take up employment. This should be recorded on the Void Monitoring Register.

Where discretion is used, this must be recorded in the tenant file and on SDM rent accounting as a diary entry.

Notice of termination should be made in writing. The Notice of Termination Form ([Appendix 2](#)) should be used for this purpose. The notice should be signed by all parties where there is a joint tenancy. The Association has a termination of tenancy pack and this should be issued to all tenants submitting notice of termination. The pack is available at the front counter along with the termination form. At this point the HO should begin populating the Void Monitoring Sheet ([Appendix 3](#)) with the relevant dates for each step of the process. This sheet should be continually updated throughout the whole process.

Bereavement

Where a tenant has died and there is no-one to succeed to the tenancy, the Association must deal sensitively with the family. As entitlement to housing benefit ceases from the date of death, in all cases a period of fourteen days is to be given rent free to enable the property to be cleared. Rent should be paid by the family after this period. Discretion to exceed this fourteen day period will lie with the Housing Manager. Rent will be charged for any period following the agreed date if the keys are not handed in. Where the keys are late, the Housing Officer will try on 3 consecutive working days to contact the family for keys, if there is no response or the keys are not returned by the 3rd working day, the Housing Officer will arrange for the locks to be changed and the cost will be recharged to the family, together with any additional costs for clearing the property.

Where a tenant has died and they are in receipt of the Housing Benefit the tenancy will end the Sunday following the date of death. If the tenant pays full rent the tenancy will end on the date of death.

A manual void adjustment request will be referred to Finance so that an adjustment can be made at the end of the rent period for the 14 day period of non-collectable rent.

The tenancy termination date on SDM should be the same as the date of death; and any rent adjustments required thereafter should be authorised by the Housing Manager.

Where there is no family or next of kin, contact should be made with Fife Council Social Work Services.

Abandonment

Abandoned properties will be dealt with by the Housing Officer in line with [the Abandonment Policy and Procedures](#).

Void Tracking Form

On receipt of notice of termination, the Housing Officer should complete the void tracking form ([Appendix 3A](#)) and update the Void Monitoring Sheet ([Appendix 3](#)).

Tenant Termination Acknowledgement

The Housing Officer will be responsible for issuing the tenant termination acknowledgement letter ([Appendix 3B](#)), including the Tenancy Termination Pack, and arranging a date with Prism Property Solutions for a pre-termination visit to be carried out.

The pre-termination visit should be carried out within **14 days** of receiving the notice of termination.

Pre-Allocation Form

The Pre-Allocation Form ([Appendix 4](#)) form should be completed by the prospective new tenant along with the HO. This will determine if the prospective new tenant will be able to manage to property financially.

The Housing Officer is responsible for completing the Allocation Check Form ([Appendix 5](#)) and should forward this to the Housing Manager for authorisation.

Pre Termination Visit

The pre termination visit should be arranged by the HO inviting Prism to attend. Should our main contact at Prism be un-available to attend then they shall arrange for another member of their staff to come along. Prism should also be prompted at this point on the electrical safety check and void inspection being required.

The purpose of this visit is to establish if there are any outstanding arrears; and also if there are any repairs for which the tenant will be held liable. If there are either, the tenant should be instructed to set up an arrangement for repayment of the arrears; and if there are any repairs required they should be given the opportunity to carry out this work themselves or they will be required to sign [a rechargeable repairs mandate](#) form for the required work. Before the visit the HO should check the [Asbestos Database](#) to verify if the property is listed as containing asbestos. For further information on Recharges please refer to the [Rechargeable Policy](#) and [Procedure](#)

The House Health Check form ([Appendix 6](#)) should be completed and then signed by the tenant and the HO. On return to the office a Pre-termination Inspection letter ([Appendix 6A](#)) along with a copy of the signed House Health Check form should be sent to the tenant to confirm what has been agreed at the house health check.

During this visit the Housing Officer should also note if there is a need to request an asbestos survey. Details of how to request this is outlined in [Appendix 6C](#). If the results are positive, form ([Appendix 6D](#)) should be supplied to the new tenant at the tenancy sign up.

When the visit is completed The HO will confirm with Prism if the void can be managed by PPS without the HO needing to attend the Void Inspection. If the property is in a poor condition or if significant work is required the HO will attend the void inspection with Prism.

If the HO and Prism cannot get access for pre-termination visit then the HO will attend the void inspection with PPS.

Allocating the Property

It will be the responsibility of the Housing Officer to allocate the property in accordance with the [Allocation Policy](#).

Potential applicants should be identified within 7 days of the termination notice being received, and an EOI or firm offer should be issued 14 days prior to the termination date.

At this stage, the allocating officer should be able to ascertain whether a SSST will be needed for the new tenant. If this is highlighted, then the allocating officer should use the SSST Policy and Procedures.

Visits or office interviews with short listed housing applicants should be arranged as soon as possible. Prior to an offer being made the Housing Officer should discuss with the Housing Manager any particular estate management issues that may impact on the allocation.

The purpose of the visit or office interview is to establish that the applicant's circumstances are unchanged and that the points awarded are still accurate. This contact is also an opportunity to give applicants information about any notice they may need to provide; as well as advice about the property and the likely start date of the tenancy.

All staff carrying out visits must follow the procedures laid down in the Personal Safety at Work Procedure.

Issue Instructions for Pre-Termination Repairs

Any void repairs required are to be recorded on the House Health Check form ([Appendix 6](#)) by the Housing Officer. Repairs should be instructed as soon as possible and where possible should be carried out before the tenancy ends. If only minor repairs are required these can be left until the new tenant moves in. This should be agreed with the HO, Prism and the tenant.

Any re-charge repairs should be identified at this stage. Prism should inform the HO of any recharges by email (included in the list of works to be carried out by Prism). The void repairs will show on the jobs raised report the following day. The CSA shall code the work order so that finance know what works have to be re-charged

Repairs for which the outgoing tenant is to be re-charged should be clearly noted with invoices issued and payment pursued. A copy of the house health check form should be sent to the tenant along with the pre-termination inspection letter (as above) and any mandates for recharges. Refer to the [Recharge Policy](#).

All properties as a minimum must have gas & electrical checks completed prior to re-let. Arrangements should be made at this stage to have these safety checks carried out 1 day after the keys are due to be handed in. Electrical safety checks should be arranged for completion within 1- 2 days of void inspection either with Prism or with RB Grant. Any further electrical work identified at the safety check can then be added to the existing void work by PPS. HO will arrange void inspections with PPS 7 days prior to the expected tenancy end date. It is the responsibility of Prism to arrange the electrical check and the HO to arrange the gas check.

Keys in on Time

The key register on the SDM void module should be maintained by the Housing Officer. When issuing or receiving 101 keys for a void property the action should be updated using the SDM key register.

If the keys for a void property are not handed in by 4.00pm on the date of termination, and there have been no other arrangements made with the tenant, the Housing Officer should contact the tenant and find out if there is good reason for this delay. The tenant should be advised that they will be charged rent per day for every day that they keep the keys.

If the tenant cannot be contacted over 3 consecutive working days then the Housing Officer should arrange for the locks to be changed as soon as possible; and for gas and electrical safety checks to be postponed where these have already been arranged. The HO should notify Prism of this action.

Expression of Interest

An EOI should be issued within 14 days of notice of termination. It has to be accepted, however, that we cannot reasonably expect an applicant to indicate anything more than interest in a particular property until we are in a position to allow them to view it.

If the property is in good condition it may be possible for an accompanied viewing to be arranged with the incoming tenant prior to the termination date. This should only be done with the agreement of the outgoing tenant – (recorded on [Appendix 2](#))

With the exception of UHH applicants; offers made prior to the termination date must be an EOI rather than a firm offer, as it is possible that the outgoing tenant could change their mind. This must be

explained to the applicant. In the event that this happens to a transfer applicant they will have their position protected and they will be offered the next suitable property that becomes available.

Multiple EOIs for one property should not be used unless this is authorised by the Housing Manager.

Once the outgoing tenant has moved out, arrangements should be made to allow the prospective tenant to view the property. In view of the fact that it is likely that repairs will be ongoing, it is essential that this is an accompanied viewing with the Housing Officer.

Void Inspection

For properties where the pre-termination visit has identified that further work will be required a void inspection should be carried out within one day of the keys being handed in. This inspection should be completed with the HO and Prism unless it has already been agreed at the pre-termination visit that PPS can manage the void without the HO attending.

It is the responsibility of the Housing Officer to contact Prism and make arrangements for a representative to be present at the inspection.

Where previously agreed the HO and Prism will meet at the void property, with Prism being responsible for collecting details on all work required.

Gas and Electric meter readings should be taken with a copy of the readings, amount of debt (if any) and the meter serial number emailed to the HO. The HO is responsible for:

- Contacting MTT Scotland to request a RTI code
- Send an email to Prism prior to the void inspection so that Prism can reset the electric meter.

Card meters (gas – with debt – pay as you go)

- Send an email to MTT Scotland informing them that property will soon be void
- Once property is void and a debt on the meter send a further email to inform of the serial number and amount of debt
- MTT Scotland will send a gas card to clear the debt on the meter.

Key meters (electric – with debt – pay as you go)

- Send to email to MTT Scotland informing them that property is void with a debt on the meter
- An 8 digit code will be provided by MTT Scotland
- Take a key (in HO filing cabinet), take to pay zone venue who will programme the key with the code. HO will need to place key in meter to clear debt (there will be £5 credit on the key)

Card and Key meters

- Take reading at sign off
- Email readings to MMT Scotland

Prism will email the list of works to be carried out by their operatives to OVHA repair group. Should changes be required to the process of the work being carried out in the Void then this should be discussed and agreed. These changes should be added to the Void board

Target dates of either 5/10/15 days or 30 days for major void repairs should be agreed Between Prism and OVHA. The target dates are very dependent on the amount of work that is required to be carried out at each property. Prism shall follow up with an email detailing the works to be carried out; if the target date for completion is not detailed within this email then this can be obtained from the completion report that will follow.

It is the HO responsibility to inform Prism and Kingdom Gas of the change of tenancy details by emailing the details to both. It is Prism responsibility to change the locks at every change of tenancy.

Exit Standard

Tenants should be made aware that OVHA has standards that it expects tenants to achieve prior to them vacating the property. This information (staff information [Appendix 7](#), [tenant information 7A](#)) is to be provided to tenants at the pre-termination visit.

The Association has a lettings standard that void properties must be brought up to. This is outlined in [Appendix 7B](#)

Pre-exit Checks that do not go ahead

Void repairs are to be recorded on the House Health Check form ([Appendix 6](#)) and should be ordered within 1 working day of the inspection. The following timescales should be agreed with the Contractor at the post termination inspection:

- 5 Working Days – Gas and electrical safety checks only.
- 10 Working Days – Gas and electrical safety checks, 1 – 2 doors and any additional minor repairs to be completed by OVHA (e.g. repairs to kitchen units or patching small holes in walls).
- 15 Working Days – Works that include 3 or more internal doors, skirting, door standards, individual sanitary appliances, additional electrical repairs, additional cleaning and loft or garden clearances.

If there are major works required quotes should be obtained and an appropriate timescale should be agreed at the void Inspection between those present. Prism will obtain any quotes and inform OVHA should the total of the void be £2,500 or over.

It should be noted at this stage if a decoration allowance will be payable, its value and for which rooms. The decoration allowance will be agreed with the incoming tenant at the accompanied viewing with the HO or at the Pre-let check with the HO.

Issue Firm Offer

The Housing Officer should issue a firm offer letter within 5 working days of the termination date. If the formal offer is accepted, the tenancy should start on the first available date, or the first available Monday if the tenant is in receipt of housing benefit.

If more substantial repairs are required, these should be monitored by the Housing Officer. As soon as repairs are nearing completion, a formal offer letter should be issued. The 'Genero' system should be updated as and when required and the Signing-up Checklist ([Appendix 10](#)) should be completed at this stage.

Final Checks

Prism will be responsible for informing the HO (by email) that they have completed their work on the void. Prims and OVHA HO shall inspect the property to ensure all works are completed. Should Prism not be able to attend this visit, the HO shall attend and report back any works to Prism where required. Once all work is complete the HO will inform Prism and the MRO will carry out a final pre-let check to confirm that the property has not been vandalised, to check the condition of the garden and to take final meter readings. The MRO shall inform the HO of the readings with the HO referring the final meter reading to the appropriate suppliers (as above).

It is also the new tenant's responsibility to notify the gas and electricity suppliers that they are moving in and to ensure that meter readings at entry are properly recorded (above states that we do this). The pre-let check form ([Appendix 6B](#)) will be part of the sign-up process and the tenant will sign for and receive a copy of the form.

Prism will follow the requirements as stated in the Re-Let Cleaning Standard, as outlined in [Appendix 8](#). The final clean, lock change and legionella checks ([Appendix 11](#)) will be issued as a separate work order following the completion of all other repairs by the Contractor.

The HO will attend pre-let check with MRO. Prism will email the HO to confirm when PPS work is complete and will only attend pre-let check if required.

Void work needs to be checked and signed off by Prism. If additional work is identified after the void inspection then a new completion date should be agreed and confirmed with PPS and the MRO.

Void Board

It is the responsibility of the HO to update the void board with information to ensure that all steps of the process are taken and are within target:

Address – enter the address of the void property

Apt Size – enter the size of the apartment (e.g. 3apt, 4apt)

Void Date – enter the date the property becomes void

Void Inspection Date – enter the date the void will be inspected

Work Complete Due Date – enter the date the work is due to be completed by (5/10/15 days from void inspection date)

Pre let Date – enter the date the void should be ready for a final inspection (to ensure all works are complete) before letting to new tenant

Comments – use this column for any additional comments

Spend Authorisation

Prism have the authority to authorise void repairs up to the total of £2,000 with a further £500 being allocated for testing such as EPC and safety checks. Although this amount is set higher than the budgeted cost per void, on average the spend is within budget.

Monitoring

The Housing Manager will continue to monitor performance on voids ([Appendix 9](#)), it is essential that records are accurately maintained to enable this to be carried out. It is the responsibility of the Housing Officer to ensure that all relevant information is recorded on the termination tracking form, void monitoring sheet and within the SDM Void Module.

Void Index Pro-forma

Each void should have a copy of the void index pro-forma ([Appendix 13](#)) saved to the paper copy file. The checklist should be 'ticked' when completed and filed in the following folders:

- Former Tenant File
- New Tenant File
- Property/Void File

Link to all Appendices

[Appendix 1 – Summary of Responsibilities](#)

[Appendix 2 – Notice of Termination](#)

[Appendix 3 – Void Monitoring Sheet](#)

[Appendix 3A – Void Tracking Form](#)

[Appendix 3B – Tenant Termination Acknowledgement](#)

[Appendix 4 – Pre Allocation Form](#)

[Appendix 5 - Allocations Check](#)

[Appendix 6 – House Health Check](#)

[Appendix 6A – Pre-termination Inspection](#)

[Appendix 6B – Pre-let Check](#)

[Appendix 6C & 6D – Asbestos Guidance](#)

[Appendix 7 & 7A– Exit Standard](#)

[Appendix 7B – Letting Standards](#)

[Appendix 8 – Re-let Cleaning Standards](#)

[Appendix 9 – Performance Standards](#)

[Appendix 10 – Singing-up Checklist](#)

[Appendix 11 – Legionella Monitoring Form](#)

[Appendix 12 – Void Process Flowchart](#)

[Appendix 13 – Void Index Pro-forma](#)