

## Policy Statement

# Void Management Policy

## Introduction

This policy sets out Loddon Homes Limited (LHL) intention to maintain good quality homes whereby empty properties are processed and re-let in the minimum possible time, to agreed standards of cleanliness and repair and under sound financial control.

## Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure customer satisfaction with the Minimum Letting Standard
- Minimise the number of homes empty at any time
- Minimise the time taken to effect repairs and re-let each property
- Minimise rent losses from empty dwellings
- Minimise the adverse impact of voids (e.g. vandalism)
- Maintain financial control of repairs and maintenance expenditure on voids
- Ensure that properties for re-let meet the Minimum Letting Standard

## The Voids Process

### OVERVIEW

Loddon Homes has set performance standards, targets and priorities for managing empty properties and receives reports on performance. Quality control checks are in place to ensure that procedures are followed and that work is completed to a satisfactory standard and will be carried out to agreed time-scales.

In order to promote continuous service improvement, the void turnaround time and other performance indicators will be, benchmarked, reviewed and amended where required on an annual basis.

The voids process will be managed by a team comprising representatives from LHL and Wokingham Housing (the client) and its nominated suppliers (the contractors).

At which time it becomes appropriate meetings of a frequency to be determined, chaired by the Lettings Officer, will be held to monitor progress on current voids, to review procedures where necessary and to consider appropriate training programmes for operatives and support staff.

Works will be managed as a partnership and in a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation, with each member of the team working towards meeting or exceeding the minimum letting standard or targets for its area of responsibility.

Procedures will be process driven and will rely upon a flow of information (coordinated through the letting agents central database) and pro-active liaison between team members to meet the agreed targets for performance and standards.

The Company will measure performance according to a range of statutory and local performance indicators, including:

## Policy Statement

- Percentage of the stock void as at 31st March each year
- Average re-let time for all void properties (by type)
- Average time to effect repairs (by type)
- Percentage of void rent loss
- Number of re-lets
- No. of days void per property

Properties that remain empty for more than 30 days will be referred to the Response Services Manager and Neighbourhood Services Manager who will determine appropriate courses of action. This is also monitored by Senior Managers.

## SCOPE

Monitoring of each void will cover the period from the date of first notification (or discovery) of a possible vacancy, to the date when the property is re-occupied.

Allocation, letting and viewing procedures will be operated in line with the Lettings Procedures with targets to achieve average void periods of:

21\* days for general needs properties and

26\* days for sheltered units.

Any disabled adaptations that have been installed will be recorded by the **Lettings Officer** to assist in identifying appropriate prospective tenants. Any adaptations that are not required by incoming tenants will be removed and, if possible, re-used elsewhere.

Staff will consider the appropriate action to take regarding the outgoing customer's obligations (as noted in the tenancy agreement) when Notice to Terminate the Tenancy is proposed. (e.g. enforcement of rechargeable works)

- Exceptions to the target 21 and 26 day re-letting time frames will apply in the case of the following circumstances:
  - - Properties that will take longer to re-let due to reasons outside of the re-let process, to include:
  - Properties requiring Occupation Therapist visits prior to the property being offered to a nominee with specific medical needs
  - Properties with a high level of refusals
  - Properties that require notifiable asbestos removal

## TERMINATION OF TENANCY

## Policy Statement

**Neighbourhood Services** will process all requests to terminate tenancies from outgoing Tenant(s) or authorised agents acting on behalf of the tenant(s). **Housing Services** will seek one month's notice in writing to terminate the tenancy.

### DECENT HOMES AND OTHER MAJOR WORKS

The **Planned Maintenance Manager** will advise on whether any programmed repairs and/or prior refusals can be undertaken whilst the property is void without causing undue pressure on Planned Maintenance programmes, budgets or void turnaround times.

As a general rule, void works will not be delayed to suit planned programmes and planned maintenance programme will not be altered at short notice to meet a voids deadline if there is any impact on other tenants or if it is less cost effective.

Opportunities will be taken to undertake major works post-occupation in order to minimise the void period and to give the incoming tenant an opportunity to be consulted.

### DAMAGE CAUSED BY OUTGOING TENANT

The **Lettings Officer and/or Property Inspectors** will establish whether repair or replacement is due to negligence or damage by the outgoing tenant, their family or visitors and should be recharged and/or reported to the police. (See recharge policy)

Photographic evidence will be taken when the property is first inspected and immediately after it becomes empty.

### ABANDONED PROPERTIES

**Neighbourhood Services** will implement its procedure for dealing with abandoned properties.

Neighbourhood Services will make all enquiries necessary to trace the tenant and to re-occupy or bring the property back into stock at the earliest opportunity

### THE PRE-VOID INSPECTION

The Lettings Officer will arrange a pre-termination visit within three working days of the first report of a proposed vacancy to:

- Estimate the void category, once the property has been vacated and all furniture removed a final void category will be selected
- Set the target re-let date
- Match the property to a suitable tenant
- Establish the outgoing tenant's responsibilities and identify rechargeable works

## Policy Statement

- Identify asbestos and any other potential health & safety issues at the earliest possible stage
- Determine whether further pre-inspections are required by technical staff to establish the extent of works required or to advise on asbestos or other health & safety issues.

When required to do so by the **Lettings Officer, a Property Inspector** will undertake a technical pre-inspection within five working days from the date of the request.

## VOID CATEGORIES

For a property to be made available for re-letting it must meet the Minimum Letting Standard.

The amount and nature of work required to bring each property up to the minimum standard will determine which void category is appropriate for each property

The **Lettings Officer, with the advice of a Property Inspector** where appropriate, will assess which void category will be used to repair and re-let the property most efficiently and effectively. This will establish the 'ready to let' date.

There are four void categories for general needs accommodation:

**Minor Void** (no capital works) – 10 working days

**Major Void 1** ( Capital works but no rewiring) - 15 working days

**Major Void 2** (Rewire or part rewire) – 15 working days

**Major Void 3** (Capital works plus rewire or part rewire) – 20 working days

There are four void categories for sheltered/supported living accommodation

**Minor Void** (no capital works) – 10 working days

**Major Void 1** ( Capital works but no rewiring) - 10 working days

**Major Void 2** (Rewire or part rewire) – 10 working days

**Major Void 3** (Capital works plus rewire or part rewire) – 15 working days

For all works completed a voids surveyor will inspect works and provide a snagging/extras list within two working days of completing the works and completes an EPC if required.

Capital works denotes any work to the structure and exterior of property building, as well as any work to the common areas of the building and estate.

## CONTRACTOR AND SUB-CONTRACTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

### Cleaning and Clearance

The Voids Team will organise the clearance of the property (including loft spaces) and, on completion of works, cleaning to the Minimum Letting Standard.

## Policy Statement

### Gas, water, oil and electrical safety checks

The nominated contractor will ensure that:

- Installations comply with standards and regulations for existing properties current at the time of inspection
- One copy of the gas safety report is left at the property
- One copy of both the gas safety report and electrical test certificate are sent to the staff at WHL
- the relevant sections of the void checklist at each property are completed showing the location of meters, consumer units and stopcocks.

### All contractors and sub-contractors

All contractors and sub-contractors shall:

- meet or exceed the Minimum Letting Standard
- advise the **Response Services Manager** if repair costs at any one property are expected to exceed the maximum allowed for each void type
- endeavour to meet the target 'ready to let' dates established by reference to category and inform the **Works Supervisor and Lettings Officer** of any delays as soon as they become apparent
- complete the relevant sections of the voids checklist at each property to maintain a complete record of progress
- provide stock survey data when requested
- submit claims for work completed within 7 days that clearly show the nature and extent of work carried out

## 10.0 ENERGY PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Current EPCs must be provided at the time of offer. In the event that works are carried out whilst the property is void that would affect energy performance a further inspection will be carried out prior to the new tenant taking occupation. One copy will be left at the property (for inclusion in the Tenants Handbook) and one copy will be passed the **Service Delivery Team**.

EPCs will be completed by a properly trained and technically competent officer or contractor.

The policy does not require all voids to be post-inspected. Voids that do not have an existing EPC when the void notification is first received will be certified before an offer is made. Other voids will have EPCs issued at post-inspection or at a later date in accordance with the relevant Building Surveyors agreed timetable.

## Policy Statement

### 11.0 POST INSPECTION

All properties will be post inspected. Cost ceilings will be established by the Response Services Manager before the start of each financial year.

It is the responsibility of the Property Inspectors and the Works Supervisor to ensure that quality standards are maintained within the budget available, that poor workmanship is referred back to contractors for rectification and that appropriate feedback is provided to the Voids Team to ensure that standards are maintained and improved.

### 12.0 RE-LETTING OF PROPERTIES

The Lettings Officer will ensure that properties are allocated and let as quickly as possible, following the agreed allocation and letting procedures. Every effort will be made having due regard to let properties with a minimum void period. The aim of this policy is to ensure processes are in place to let properties within timescales set down as best practice. the Asset Management Strategy and the sustainability of the area and tenancy. Any recommendations for disposal of stock will be in the form of a written report to the Loddon Homes Board for further consideration.

No property will be re-let without an Energy Performance Certificate, a valid gas safety report (if one is required) or an acceptable electrical safety certificate.

At the letting, a set of photographs of the property will be taken and its condition will be agreed with the tenant.

Incoming tenant's will sign to accept the condition of the property that they are moving in to, agreeing to any post-occupation works that are required and accepting responsibility for the maintenance of any fittings that will not be maintained by Loddon Homes Limited (e.g. showers and fences)

## Implementation

LHL Board will delegate responsibility to WHL staff for ensuring that this policy is communicated and implemented.

Detailed procedures will be developed and maintained by our contractors in line with this policy, to give further direction to officers regarding the management of void properties.

The Company will provide training for staff to ensure they fully understand the wider issues surrounding this policy and the procedure.

## Information and Technology

Appropriate use will be made of 'handheld technology' (personal digital assistants [PDAs], tablets, laptops etc.) wherever possible and where business cases identify their effective use.

## Policy Statement

### Monitoring and Reporting

A record will be maintained of:

- Pre-void inspections
- Property inspections
- Allocation of works
- Authorisation of repairs and repair costs
- Actual and target completion dates of works
- Offers made to applicants, including refusals and reasons for refusal
- Feedback on issues identified on each void that can be used to improve the service

A post-lettings survey form will be provided to each incoming tenant by the Lettings Officer to determine customer satisfaction.

The **Neighbourhood Services Manager** is responsible for monitoring all aspects of, and reporting on, procedural effectiveness relating to applications for housing, the allocation and re-letting of property.

The **Response Services Manager** will report on costs, and the time taken to undertake repairs to empty properties, seeking new and innovative ways of keeping this time to a minimum whilst maintaining quality standards.

The **Rents Team Leader** will keep a record of the loss of income to LHL from void periods, and recommend necessary action to minimise this loss.

The **Lettings Officer, Property Inspectors and Works Supervisor** are responsible for ensuring that performance meets required targets and Minimum Letting Standards. Performance on the management of void properties will be reported via monthly, quarterly and annual Performance Indicators using the corporate KPI system, and results will be summarised for customers at the LHL Annual General Meeting.

### Disputes

The **Response Services Manager and Neighbourhood Services Manager** will act jointly to resolve day-to-day management issues. In the event that agreement cannot be reached, disputes may be escalated for the consideration the Asset Manager and WHL's Managing Director.

### Reviews

LHL will review this policy, procedures and staff training needs at least once every five years or in line with any relevant legislative changes to ensure that it continues to operate best practice, achieve measurable results, and achieve continuous service improvement.

WHL staff will be responsible for ensuring that policy reviews are undertaken, that appropriate consultation takes place and that revisions are reported to the Board for its approval.

## Policy Statement

### Equal Opportunities and Diversity

The Company seeks to embrace equality and diversity in all aspects of its business.

The Company aims to ensure that all of its customers regardless of race, colour, gender, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status or appearance have the right at all times to be treated fairly and equally and enjoy their homes quietly

This policy will be administered within this ethos and can be provided in larger print format, alternative language, tape, or Braille as requested.

The Company will seek to ensure that it does everything reasonably within its power to combat any form of harassment.

### Related documents and further background reading

Chartered Institute of Housing (electronic manual)  
 WBC Minimum Letting Standard  
 Lettings Procedures  
 National Housing Federation: Best Practice in Maintenance  
 Chartered Institute of Housing: Improving Repairs and Maintenance Services

| Review period   | Consultation required |
|---|-----------------------|
| Annual<br>Next review date: June 2021   |                       |
| Author  |                       |
| Name: Karen Howick<br>Business Support Manager<br>Email:<br>Karen.howick@wokingham.gov.uk<br>Tel: 0118 974 6952 |                       |
| Comments  |                       |
|   |                       |
|   |                       |



## Policy Statement

### Loddon Homes Ltd – Minimum Letting Standard

#### Introduction

This policy sets out Loddon Homes Minimum Letting Standard. It supports the Void Management Policy to ensure that empty properties are re-let to agreed standards of cleanliness and repair.

#### Statement

Loddon Homes wants to make moving into your new home as simple as possible for you.

When you move in it will be safe and secure and some works will have been carried out.

This document shows the standard that you should expect when you move in.

Some other works might be carried out after you have moved in. If this is the case, you will be informed about them by **our Lettings Officer** when you view the property.

#### General

- The property and garden will be clear of rubbish
- Any asbestos will have been checked, left safe and appropriate information provided
- Any fire or smoke alarms and door entry systems will have been checked and left in a working condition

#### Floors and Stairs

- These will be safe and in good condition so that floor coverings can be laid
- Where tiles have had to be replaced every effort will have been made to find a best match;
- Kitchens, bathrooms and toilets will have vinyl floor coverings that are in good condition and that present no trip hazards
- Other rooms will not necessarily have floor coverings but where these have been left by outgoing tenants, and are to a habitable standard, they might be left down at LHLs discretion
- Laminate flooring that might be seen at first viewing might need to be removed in the course of undertaking repairs and will not be replaced. Laminate floors will only be left in situ if they will not affect other future maintenance and if the incoming tenant accepts responsibility for their maintenance or replacement

#### Doors and Windows

- All external doors will be secure and weather tight
- Two sets of keys for each external door will be provided
- All windows will be secure (but not necessarily lockable) and will open and close easily
- All rooms will have internal doors where a suitable frame is fitted

## Policy Statement

### Electrics

- All electrics will have been checked and will be working safely
- Sufficient sockets will be provided in each room to meet the prevailing electrical regulations, health & safety or other guidelines
- The consumer unit will have a secure cover and will meet the requirements of the current edition of the electrical regulations in relation to existing properties.
- Immersion heaters will be checked and, where appropriate, thermostats will be replaced to comply with prevailing standards
- Immersion heater switches will be clearly labelled

### Gas, Oil and LPG

- All installations will be checked and left in a usable condition. A landlord's gas safety certificate will be issued where appropriate, a copy of which will be left in the Tenants' Handbook.

### Solid Fuel Systems

- Any open fires will be blocked up, heating systems removed and replaced with a suitable alternative.

### Heating

- The property will have heating to all living areas, kitchens and bathrooms
- A hot water system will be provided and will have been checked for safety and compliance
- Appropriate levels of ventilation and insulation will be provided to ensure that heat is well distributed within rooms

### Plumbing

- All plumbing will be watertight
- All sinks and baths will have plugs and chains
- The stopcock from the incoming water main will be clearly labelled and its location will be included in the Tenants' Handbook
- All sanitary equipment will be clean, in good working order and free from lime scale
- There will be a minimum of three courses of 150mm tiles around the bath and two courses as a splash back to sinks
- If there is a shower, tiling will be to the ceiling around the bath
- NDH will maintain only the primary means of bathing. In most cases this will be a bath. Showers are sometimes the only means of bathing in Sheltered Accommodation or where homes have been adapted. If a shower has been installed in addition to a bath and it is safe and usable it might be left for the use of the incoming tenant but will not be maintained or replaced in the event that it breaks down.

## Policy Statement

### Kitchens

- Space permitting, there will be a minimum of three storage cupboards so that food storage can be kept separate from cleaning materials
- At least one worktop will be provided.
- There will be a minimum of three courses of tiles as a splash back to the worktops
- If the kitchen is in need of replacement, this will be carried out post-occupation so that tenants can be consulted about the look and design of their kitchen.

### Decoration

- Internal decoration is the tenant's responsibility. Decoration vouchers might be issued to assist in redecorating your home at Loddon Homes' discretion.
- Otherwise, walls and ceilings will be clean and ready to decorate. If wall coverings (e.g. wallpaper) are clean and undamaged they will be left

### External

- Any garages or external stores will have doors that are secure and operational (but not necessarily lockable)
- Grassed areas of gardens will be strimmed and left ready to maintain.
- Fences between LHL properties are the responsibility of tenants. Other fences might be the responsibility of LHL or neighbouring properties that are not owned by LHL. The **Lettings Officer** will inform incoming tenants of their responsibilities for fencing.

### Reviews

LHL will review this policy and any associated procedures and staff training needs at least once every five years to ensure that it continues to operate best practice, achieve measurable results, and achieve continuous service improvement.

The policy and all associated procedures will be reviewed immediately following policy or legislation changes required by the Housing Corporation (and subsequently by the Housing and Communities Agency and The Tenants' Services Agency) or in the event that changes are required to maintain consistency with policy changes in other areas.

**The Asset Manager** will be responsible for ensuring that policy reviews are undertaken, that appropriate consultation takes place and that revisions are reported to the Board for its approval.

### Equal Opportunities and Diversity

The Company seeks to embrace equality and diversity in all aspects of its business.

The Company aims to ensure that all of its customers regardless of race, colour, gender, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status or appearance have the right at all times to:

## Policy Statement

- be treated fairly and equally
- enjoy their homes quietly

This policy will be administered within this ethos and can be provided in larger print format, alternative language, tape, or Braille as requested.

The Company will seek to ensure that it does everything reasonably within its power to combat any form of harassment.

## Related documents and further background reading

Chartered Institute of Housing (electronic manual)  
 Void Management Policy  
 Lettings Procedures  
 National Housing Federation: Best Practice in Maintenance  
 Chartered Institute of Housing: Improving Repairs and Maintenance Services

| <b>Review period</b>   | <b>Consultation required</b>   |
|--|--|
| Annual<br>Next review date: 15 January 2019  | Neighbourhood Services Team<br>Rents Team<br>Response & Property Services Team<br>Planned Maintenance Team<br>Service Delivery Team<br>Strategy & Performance Manager<br>Customer Forum<br>Nominated contractors |
| <b>Author</b>  |  |
| Name: Karen Howick<br>Business Support Manager<br>Email: karen.howick@wokingham.gov.uk<br>Tel: 0118 908 8479 |  |