

**Void Management Policy**

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| **Date of Policy** | **October 2020** |
| **Date approved by Management Committee** |  |
| **Date for review** |  |

**VOID PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The turnover of housing stock is an integral part of social housing provision that inevitably results in periods where properties are void (empty). Ruchazie Housing Association is aware that the good management of void properties and the limitation of void periods is vital to maximise rental income, provide a quality service, meet housing need and achieve good estate management.

**2 SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the Association’s position on the management of voids.

2.2 Void management activity covers a number of related activities. These include

* + tenancy termination
	+ property inspections
	+ identifying rechargeable works and other tenant responsibilities
	+ ordering and supervising repair work
	+ offering tenancies and arranging viewing
	+ creating tenancies, signing tenancy agreements etc.

2.3 The Void Property Management Policy applies to all rented property owned or managed by the Association.

2.4 The Void Property Management Policy complies with and supplements Ruchazie’s Financial Regulations.

**3 CONTEXT**

* 1. The Void Property Management Policy meets with legislative and good practice requirements; this includes the following:

**Scottish Secure Tenancy** – The Association can exercise direct control over its tenants via the terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement. The purpose of this is to protect the interest of its tenants, the wider community and the Association.

**Housing (Scotland Act) 2001** - The Void Property Management Policy adheres to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, in particular guidance in relation to the termination of a tenancy (notified or abandoned), compensation for improvements and access rights for inspection.

#### ****The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008 –** the Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have a valid Energy Performance Certificate in place.**

#### The Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1994 – the Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have benefited from an annual inspection of gas installations, appliances and associated components e.g. carbon monoxide detectors if installed. In all cases a gas safety check will be carried out prior to handover of keys.

**The Construction, Design and Management Regulations –** The Association ensures that it meets Health and Safety requirements in the management of voids, particularly relating to repairs by Association or contracted staff.

**Data Protection Act 1998** - Within the terms of the Data Protection Act the Association will ensure that information provided by an applicant and/or tenant, or sought by the Association is relevant only to the management of void properties and that all such information received is treated in the strictest confidence.

Under the provisions of the Data Protection Act, individuals have the right to see and receive a copy of any personal information (for which a small fee may be charged) that is held about them by the Association and to have any inaccuracies corrected.

* 1. The Void Property Management Policy also complies with the guidelines set by The Scottish Government in the Social Housing Charter. In terms of the management of voids, the Charter states that every social landlord must:

**“Housing quality and maintenance**

**4: Quality of housing**

Social landlords manage their businesses 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.”

* 1. This policy is supported by Void Property Management Procedures, which includes processes for the effective management, monitoring, repair and re-let of Ruchazie properties. (Appendix 1)

**Void Management Procedures:**

* Pre-termination inspection of a property procedures
* Termination of a property procedures
* Keys received procedures
	1. A copy of the Association’s Minimum Letting Standard is appended to this policy for information.(appendix 2)
	2. The Association will ensure that all staff receive appropriate training and support to meet the requirements of this policy and related procedures.

**4 POLICY AIMS**

4.1 The overall aim of the Void Property Management Policy is to ensure that empty Association properties are let in an efficient, cost effective and equitable fashion.

* 1. The specific objectives of the Void Property Management Policy are:
* to ensure that properties allocated by the Association meet acceptable standards
* to ensure that rent loss through vacant housing is minimised
* to ensure that the Association makes the most effective use of the housing resources available to it, to meet housing need.
* to let properties to a standard which maximises the prospects of the incoming tenant sustaining the tenancy and reducing the likelihood of a tenant terminating the tenancy as a consequence of the property condition itself.
	1. To achieve the above objectives the Association will –
	+ provide a clear statement of the level of service and standards to which the Association will work
	+ have procedures and agreed practices that are applied uniformly across the service
	+ re-let vacant properties as quickly as possible
	+ undertake repairs of vacant properties in accordance with the Association’s letting standard and statutory responsibilities
	+ ensure that the condition of the property is of a standard that will not normally lead to an offer of accommodation being refused
	+ ensure that all offers of accommodation are consistent with the Association’s allocations policies
	+ record any action taken at each stage in the void management process
	+ provide training to ensure that staff are equipped to carry out the roles expected of them
	+ keep tenants and service users informed during the void management process
	+ ensure that communication with tenants and service users is in plain English and makes clear in all cases who is the officer to contact in case of queries etc.

**5 AREAS OF RESPONSBILITY**

5.1 **The Management Committee -** has responsibility for ensuring that this policy complies with Regulatory and Legislative requirements and in meeting the Association’s Business Plan and budget commitments.

5.2 **The Director** – has responsibility for ensuring that appropriate support and timely advice is provided to the Management Committee and relevant staff to ensure compliance with Regulatory and Legislative requirements and in meeting the Association’s Business Plan and budget commitments.

**6 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Association will ensure the promotion of equal opportunities by publishing information and documentation in different languages and other formats such as large print, tape and Braille, as required.

6.2 The Association will ensure that no individual is discriminated against on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or other personal attributes, including beliefs, or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions.

**7 SUSTAINABILITY**

* 1. The approach outlined in this Policy, working together with our policies on Anti-Social Behaviour Management, Estate Management and Allocations, ensures that the Association is striving to make positive contributions towards the sustainability of our communities. The Association acknowledges the negative impact that empty homes can have on the community and aims to ensure that these are kept to a minimum.
	2. Where the void property is due to the death of the tenant (and no one is entitled to succeed to the tenancy), the termination date will be the date on which the tenant died. The tenant’s representative’s will have 14 days to clear out the house of furniture and carpets during which time no rent charge will be made. However where the tenant’s representative take longer than 14 days, the Association may make a charge for loss of rent and service charges (if applicable) for each day’s rent and service charge lost to the Association beyond those 14 days.
	3. The Association will use the information gathered from the inspection of empty properties, from refusals and from exit surveys on termination to inform our long term maintenance investment plans and asset management strategies and priorities. This information will also inform any future policy review.

**8 RISK MANAGEMENT**

8.1 The Management Committee will consider the Risk Management factors of Void Management including:-

* Financial risk through potential failure to ensure that enough income is collected to cover operating costs due to excessive rent lost to voids
* Non-compliance with the Social Housing Charter outcomes and performance indicators.

##### 9 HEALTH & SAFETY

* 1. The Association will ensure that staff will work in accordance with the Lone Working Procedures when inspecting properties, carrying out accompanied viewings or applicant assessments as necessary.
	2. The Association will ensure that all inspections and work undertaken at properties will be carried out in accordance with Health & Safety guidance and regulation.

**10 TENANT CONSULTATION STRATEGY**

10.1 The Association will consult on the Void Property Management Policy and its component parts with tenants, the tenant panels and Management Committee. Comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Surveys and new tenant Home Visit responses will assist in the shaping of any future review of this policy.

**11 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

11.1 Any tenant may submit a Complaint, using the Association’s complaints procedure if it is felt that the Association has failed to correctly apply this Void Management Policy.

**12 Performance Monitoring**

12.1 The Association will monitor performance on void management using both statutory and local performance indicators as follows:

**Statutory Performance Indicators – Social Housing Charter**

* 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

**Local Performance Indicators**

* The percentage turnover of stock
* The average cost of repairs per void
* The number of properties refused 3 or more times, by reason
* The average number of days taken to complete void repairs

12.2 The Director has authority to annually agree local targets for the effective management of voids in the financial year. The key performance indicators, approved by Committee, will be reported quarterly to the Management Committee.

**13 POLICY REVIEW**

13.1 The Association will review the Void Management Policy every 3 years and amendments will be made as required after consultation with service users and other agencies.

Appendix 1

RUCHAZIE EMPTY PROPERTY SERVICE STANDARDS

**Void Management Procedure**

* Pre termination inspection organised during 28 day notice period –Property checked for damage during inspection and tenant advised to repair damage before end of tenancy, any reactive repairs required are noted.
* On receipt of keys a void termination inspection is carried out by PSO (standard void inspection sheet used). During the inspection each room is checked for damage or repairs.
* The walls, skirting’s, flooring, ceilings, door frames, doors, ironmongery, window frames, glazing and handles are all checked for damage or wear and tear. Electrical fittings are visually checked for any cracks or damage. Radiators are checked for damage/wear and tear.
* Kitchen worktops and units are visually inspected for damage/wear and tear, hinges are check on unit doors and runners are checked on drawer units. Plumbing at kitchen sink visually inspected and also tiling.
* The bathroom components are checked for damage/wear and tear, flush checked on WC and taps are checked on WHB and bath. Seals and tiles are also checked.
* Extractor fans, boilers and smoke alarms are checked for damage/wear and tear.
* Gas and electric meters are checked for debts and readings and photos taken of any damage or any items left throughout property.
* If the property required to be cleaned or emptied this would be carried by the Associations cleaning contractor prior to other trades attending.
* On completion of void inspection, void repairs identified would be issued to relevant contractors and a timescale would be agreed for completion. As standard all front and rear locks would be changed, and also WC seat.
* As standard a Void gas service would be arranged as well as a Void electrical inspection, and EPC would be booked in as and where required.
* Once all void works and safety checks are complete, the PSO would return and pre inspect the void works alongside the void inspection form to ensure all repairs issued have been carried out. Certificates for gas and electrics are issued by contractors and a copy of these along with the keys are given to the Senior HSCO for sign up. A copy of an up to date EPC is placed in the electrical/hall cupboard.

**Appendix 2**

**RUCHAZIE MINIMUM LETTING STANDARD**

Ruchazie Housing Association will ensure that all properties for re-letting have been subject to our standard checks for cleanliness and condition, for the integrity of all services including gas, electricity and water supply and for the proper operation of appliances for the use of water and heating.

In recognition of the need to minimise re-let periods and tenants ability to get access sooner, the Association may undertake some minor repairs after allocation / occupation e.g. minor joinery repairs or plumbing items. These will be agreed jointly by the tenant and the Housing and/or Maintenance Staff. The tenant will be advised of any outstanding works at the sign-up interview and confirm they agree with the arrangement.

The following repairs are to be completed prior to re-let:

* All items essential to ensure the property is habitable in terms of health, safety and security including standard gas and electrical safety checks.
* Repairs considered impractical to undertake in an occupied property e.g. major re-plastering, timber treatment.
* Removal and replacement, where necessary of substandard tenant alterations which are considered dangerous.

This standard complies with the Social Housing Charter outcome Housing quality and maintenance; 4: Quality of Housing.

All repairs detailed within Ruchazie’s ‘Letting Standard’ will be completed as a minimum before tenants move into their new home, unless we previously agree with a prospective tenant to complete specific repairs upon allocation.

Providing the highest level of satisfaction is a key aim of Ruchazie Housing Association and to ensure we provide a level of consistency in the standards we deliver our void properties to new tenants, we have agreed this detailed ‘Letting Standard’ for all our contractors and staff members to work to.

 **LETTABLE STANDARDS**

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| AREA OF WORKS | MINIMUM STANDARD |
| Internal – general  | * The house will be cleared of all furniture, carpets, white goods and belongings/rubbish from the previous tenant. If any floor coverings left are in a reasonable condition it will be the decision of the property Services Officer if they are to be left. Consideration should be given to the in-coming tenants request to keep existing floor coverings in order to help with the new tenancy start-up. Any floor coverings in reasonable condition which may help a new tenancy start-up will be required to be signed and accepted in a mandate by the in-coming tenant stating that they take full responsibility for the floor coverings as if it was their own and had installed themselves. Should they no longer wish to retain the floor covering after agreeing to keep it, they are required to remove and dispose of it themselves.
* Floors should be swept and all kitchen and bathroom surfaces installations will be washed down.
* All floors are swept and clean
* The property will be free from insect or rodent infestations
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| Garden Areas | * Sheds, cellars and outbuildings cleared of all contents.
* Boundaries whether fenced o5r walls, are in a reasonable and safe condition.
* Gates , particularly to the rear are secure.
* Gardens are cleared of rubbish
* Paths and driveways are in a safe condition.
* If required a first cut of grass will be completed.
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| Doors | * All doors should be intact and operating properly with appropriate handles.
* Glass doors should be removed and replaced
* Bathroom doors should have locking device.
* Any new internal doors that have been fitted will leave adequate space for carpets and laminates
* Front and back door, locks changed and checked for security, draughts and water ingress.
* Where relevant rear tenement close doors will be fitted with secure locking mechanism.
* Door entry systems – front door entry and secure rear access doors to all communal entrance areas will be services and operational
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| Windows | * All windows should be fully operational and checked for safety. Window keys should be provided to tenants where we have fitted locks.
* All glazing is in good condition
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| Floors, skirting and facings  | * All loose /missing floorboards to be repaired or replaced
* Floor surface to be even to allow floor coverings to be laid
* Missing or badly damaged skirting/facings to be repaired or replaced, when repaired to be re-secured and filled where necessary.
* Anti-slip floor coverings, where provided in amenity properties, should be in good condition. Missing or broken floorboards or tiles will be replaced to match existing fittings (where possible)

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| Woodwork/Stairs | * All internal woodwork is free from serious defects
* Stairs are secure, free from major defects and fitted with handrails.
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| Kitchen | * All kitchens (space permitting) will have sufficient units in order to meet as a minimum the SHQS.
* In general, the enclosed storage contained within, or adjacent to, the kitchen will amount to at least 1m3. This includes kitchen units and walk in storage cupboards.
* All kitchen units will be cleaned inside and out, secured to the wall and will be thoroughly checked, hinges and handles replaced or repaired where necessary. Damaged doors and drawers to be repaired/replaced where possible. Chipped and damaged worktops should be replaced where appropriate.
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| Bathroom | * Bathroom suites will be checked for chips/cracks and be repaired/replaced as necessary. Any blemishes to be recorded on house file at start of tenancy.
* Any shower installation not approved by the Association should be removed- all tiles removed and plaster where necessary.
* Any electric shower installed by the association will be checked as part of the electric safety check and all screen showers will be checked and replaced where necessary.
* Where a tenant has installed a shower and has permission, it should be checked, and if it appears to be in good working order and have a notional lifespan of three years or more, this should be checked as part of the electric safety check and any shower screen repaired/replaced if necessary.
* Extractor fans to internal bathroom are checked and left in working order.
* All sanitary fittings including cisterns, ball valves, wastepipes, taps, overflows etc. have been tested for leaks and left in full working order
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| Medical adaptations | * All medical adaptations should be inspected to ensure they are fully operational.
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| Electrics | * All electrics must be checked and a certificate of inspection copied to the house file and issued to tenant.
* All sockets and light fittings will be securely fixed and in good condition
* Obvious alterations to the electric system carried out by the existing tenant must be removed, unless compliance certificate covers these.
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| Gas | * All gas installations have a full gas safety check undertaken and a compliance certificate (CP12) issued to the new tenant, and a copy for the house file retained.
* The gas bayonet fitting should be capped. The incoming tenant to arrange uncap and fitting of cooker.
* If an outgoing tenant has installed a fixed appliance without a certificate, a maintenance officer will decide whether the appliance should be removed or retained and serviced.
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| Water Supply | * During the winter months (Oct –Mar) we will consider whether stopcocks should be shut off and the water supply drained down.
* All gutters and downpipes should be free from blockages, debris and plant growth, have adequate fall settings and be free from leaks. Replacement guttering or downpipe will be replaced like for like or similar where appropriate.
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| Decoration | * The Association is not generally responsible for the condition/level of decoration in a property. Where the condition of the decoration is deemed to be so bad as to affect the likelihood of anyone accepting the property, then the property Services Officer can authorise any decoration required.
* All plasterwork will be repaired to walls that have defects above hairline cracks, or where plaster work is not keyed to the brickwork. Hairline cracks are considered acceptable and can be repaired with decoration.
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| Safety  | * All Ruchazie properties will comply with all current fire regulations.
* Fire doors will be fitted where appropriate to comply with regulations and have automatic door closers installed ensuring the door closes mechanically.
* All current Ruchazie HA properties are fitted with hard wired/battery backup smoke alarms. These will be tested during the void inspection. In any properties added to our stock, as a minimum, one battery operated smoke alarm will be installed as a temporary measure until such times as a hard wired alarm is installed.
* All electrical circuits should be earthed in accordance with current requirements.
* Existing hard wired mains connected smoke alarms should be tested.
* Polystyrene ceiling tiles will be removed as they are considered a fire risk and repairs will be made afterwards.
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| External works  | * External painter works and associated repairs to a property will usually be carried out as part of Ruchazie’s cyclical programme. The Property Services Officer will determine whether work identified can reasonably wait until the next cyclical contract or whether more urgent work is needed. The amount and nature of the work will be taken into consideration
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