



Void Policy (Ref: HM/TS 01)

The purpose of this Policy is to outline how Manor Estates will seek to:

- Minimise loss of rental income due to properties being empty; and
- Bring empty properties to an acceptable standard for re-let as quickly as possible, ensuring that homes are available to those who need them

Policy Monitoring Details	
Department:	Housing Management and Technical Services
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Status:	Group
Date Approved by Board:	28 November 2018
Updated:	
Planned Review Date:	November 2023
Regulatory Outcomes Being Achieved:	<p>Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcome 4 – Quality of Housing <i>Social landlords manage their businesses so that;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>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 (ESSH) by December 2020.</i> <p>Outcome 13 – Value for Money <i>Social landlords manage all aspects of their business so that;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.</i>
Tenant Consultation Required:	Yes
Equalities Impact Assessment	<i>Initial</i>

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1	Introduction
1.1	The aim of this Policy is to ensure that empty properties are re-let as quickly as possible in order to minimise loss of rental income and ensure that properties are available for those who need them. The Policy also seeks to maximise tenant satisfaction with the quality of their new home.
1.2	Successful implementation of the Policy will contribute to achievement of the Association's Corporate Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Deliver excellent housing and other services which are responsive to the needs and aspirations of our customers</i>▪ <i>Invest our resources effectively to maintain good quality homes and local environments</i>▪ <i>Improve energy efficiency and advice in order to reduce tenant vulnerability to fuel poverty</i>▪ <i>Develop new housing and services to meet the needs of current and future customers</i>▪ <i>Ensure effective resource management of governance, staff, corporate and financial resources to secure the long-term future of the organisation</i>
2	Policy
2.1	Key Principles
2.1.1	For the purposes of monitoring and reporting, the Association will adopt the definitions and calculations used by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) as outlined in the Technical Guidance for completion of the Annual Report on the Charter.
2.1.2	The Association will seek to follow good practice guidance and will undertake regular benchmarking exercises with other organisations in order to learn from their experience and improve processes where appropriate.

2.1.3	<p>There will be clear channels of communication between Neighbourhood Services and Asset Management and Repairs staff to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All those involved in the processes are aware of the status of properties that are empty; and ▪ All those involved are aware of the importance of and are committed to ensuring that properties are re-let as quickly as possible.
2.2	Pre-Termination Processes
2.2.1	Neighbourhood Services staff are responsible for initial liaison with tenants seeking to end their tenancy, or with other relevant persons (e.g. relatives, support workers) where appropriate. See section 2.4 for further detail.
2.2.2	<p>Where notice of intention to end a tenancy is received, staff will seek to undertake a pre-termination inspection, the purpose of which is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carry out an initial assessment of the extent of works likely to be required to bring the property to a lettable standard; ▪ Identify works that the tenant will be required to carry out prior to the end of the tenancy; ▪ Seek agreement with the tenant to repay any outstanding rent arrears; and ▪ Confirm if the property is likely to be suitable for viewing prior to completion of void repairs. <p>Where it is anticipated that there may be significant repair or other issues in the property, a Technical Inspector will attend with the Neighbourhood Housing Officer.</p> <p>Where the Neighbourhood Housing Officer identifies unanticipated significant repair or other issues during the initial inspection, a Technical Inspector will arrange a return visit prior to the tenancy end date.</p>
2.2.3	The Association has an agreed Exit Standard that tenants are expected to meet prior to ending their tenancy. Where the standard is not achieved, tenants may be recharged any costs incurred by the Association in carrying out works that could reasonably have been done by the outgoing tenant. (See Appendix 1)
2.3	Asset Management and Repairs Processes
2.3.1	Asset Management and Repairs staff will carry out an inspection of the property and instruct the contractor regarding necessary works as soon as possible after receipt of keys.
2.3.2	As a minimum, the Association will carry out all works required to comply with legislative requirements, specifically:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gas and electrical safety checks, including EPC assessment; ▪ Asbestos checks; and ▪ Legionella tests.
2.3.4	The Association has an agreed Letting Standard that must be achieved prior to a prospective tenant being offered the property. (See Appendix 2)
2.3.5	The Association will usually carry out all repairs required to the property prior to the incoming tenant receiving the keys. If limited minor repairs are left to be completed after the start of the new tenancy, access arrangements will be made with the tenant at sign up.
2.3.6	<p>While a property is void, the Association will only carry out works that would normally be part of a planned maintenance programme if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The condition of the property does not meet the Association's Letting Standard; or ▪ A planned maintenance programme is imminent. <p>If a planned maintenance programme is due to be carried out within 1 year of the tenancy start, the incoming tenant should be given appropriate advice and information.</p>
2.3.7	Where major works are being carried out while a property is void, the time taken can only be excluded from the days to relet if the work could not be carried out if the property was occupied. (For example, if it is work usually carried out while a tenant is resident, the time taken for similar work carried out in an empty property cannot be excluded).
2.3.8	Where a property cannot be brought up to SHQS or EESSH standards, the incoming tenant should be advised of this and given appropriate information.
2.3.9	On completion of works, Asset Management and Repairs staff should re-inspect the property to ensure it meets the Association's Letting Standard. Where work has not been completed to a satisfactory standard, this should be referred back to the contractor. All such incidents should be clearly recorded, monitored and discussed with the contractor in detail.
2.3.10	Key technical processes are outlined in Appendix 3. Target timescales for these processes will be included in the procedures associated with this Policy. Where targets are not met, reasons should be clearly recorded and monitored, with action being taken as appropriate to address any issues identified.
2.4	Neighbourhood Services Processes
2.4.1	The approach the Association takes to dealing with different types of tenancy ends and identification of how the resulting vacancies are to be allocated is outlined in the Allocation Policy and associated procedures.
2.4.2	The majority of allocations will be made through EdIndex and properties should be advertised as soon as possible following notification of tenancy end.

	2.4.3	Where properties are specially designed or have been adapted to accommodate specific needs, every effort should be made to identify an applicant who would benefit from the accommodation.
	2.4.4	Where appropriate, accompanied viewings can be arranged while the property is under repair.
	2.4.5	A number of the key target timescales in respect of Neighbourhood Services processes are contained within the Allocation Policy and associated procedures, but are summarised here in Appendix 4. Where targets are not met, reasons should be clearly recorded and monitored, with action being taken as appropriate to address any issues identified.
	2.4.6	<p>In accordance with the Allocation Policy, Neighbourhood Services staff will undertake post-allocation visits to new tenants within 4 to 6 weeks of the tenancy start date.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where issues of concern are identified, either at the point of allocation or at the post-allocation visit, staff will prepare a monitoring plan. ▪ Where no issues of concern are identified, and there has been no further contact, staff will contact the tenant by telephone after 6 months to check if there is anything they require further assistance with.
3	General	
	3.1	Goods Left in Property, Including Common Stairs and Garden Areas
	3.1.1	Where a property has not been completely cleared of the tenant's belongings, the Association will arrange for these to be removed and the tenant (or their estate) will be liable for the cost.
	3.1.2	Where belongings left are of good quality and it is considered they may be of use to the incoming tenant, staff have the discretion to leave them in the property. This cannot apply to electrical or gas appliances.
4	Publicising This Policy	
	4.1	This Policy will be available on the Association's website and a hard copy will be issued to anyone who requests it.
5	Related Policies	
	5.1	<p>This Policy is related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allocation Policy
6	Monitoring and Reporting	
	6.1	<p>The effectiveness of this Policy will be monitored through reporting on the following Key Performance Indicators:</p> <p>Annual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tenancies sustained for more than 1 year

	Quarterly <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Average number of days to relet tenancies;▪ Contractor performance on completion of repairs in void properties;▪ Percentage rent loss due to properties being empty;▪ Complaints / negative feedback re condition of property at relet;▪ Number and percentage of refusals/reasons for refusal
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Appendix 1 Exit Standard

Appendix 2 Letting Standard

Appendix 3 Key Asset Management and Repairs Processes

Appendix 4 Key Timescales for Neighbourhood Services Processes

Exit Standard

At tenancy end, the Association expects that the tenant (or the tenant's representative) will:

- Empty the property of all furnishings, including floor coverings, curtains, tracks, poles and blinds
- Remove all personal belongings from the property
- Remember to empty any attic and external storage spaces
- Ensure that all internal doors are in place
- Empty all kitchen cupboards and leave kitchen surfaces clear and clean
- Remove cooker – where this is gas, ensure that the supply is capped
- Remove washing machine and turn off water supply
- Clean the bathroom
- Clean all windows
- Sweep and clean all rooms, ensuring they are free from rubbish
- Make sure that all rubbish is removed from the property and disposed of in the correct bins
- Ensure that all common areas are clear of any items that belong to you
- Arrange a special uplift of any bulky items no longer required – please let us know if the collection date is after you leave
- Ensure that any items belonging to you are removed from the garden area – this includes sheds
- Ensure that any garden area associated with the property is left neat and tidy
- Arrange to give final meter readings to your utility companies and leave meter keys and cards in the property
- Return all sets of keys, including keys/fobs for common stair and storage spaces

Noted below are some contact details for organisations that may be able to help you

CEC Number for special uplifts

Details of organisations that may collect unwanted furniture, etc for recycling

Where a property has not been completely cleared of the tenant's belongings, the Association will arrange for these to be removed and the tenant (or their estate) will be liable for the cost.

Letting Standard

In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Association has a duty to ensure that a house is wind and watertight and reasonably fit for human habitation both at the beginning of a tenancy and throughout its term. The following minimum standards have been adopted by the Association:

Cleanliness

- The property will be in a clean and tidy condition.
- The surfaces, including the kitchen, woodwork and windows will be wiped and floors swept.
- Baths, basins and toilets and showers will be clean, with water running freely.

Decoration

- Properties will be in good decorative order throughout with rooms in a clean condition and prepared for redecoration alternatively a decoration allowance may be offered and agreed by the new tenant.

Electric and Gas Services

- Metered electricity will be available.
- Metered Gas will be available if there is gas fired central heating or gas fire.
- The gas meter is capped at the commencement of the void period. The gas safety check is carried out together with recommissioning the system when the new tenancy commences. A copy of the gas service record will be handed to the new tenant by the Gas Contractor.
- The property will have facility for either a gas or an electric cooker.
- Meters will be read before occupation, and details recorded.
- SSE will commence utility supply. Tenants will be responsible for setting up accounts and can switch to their preferred supplier at any time.

Electrical Services

- Electrical systems will be checked and certified.
- Electrical sockets, switches and pendants and extract fans will be clean and free from cracks, paint or staining.
- Light fittings will be provided in every room.
- T V aerial / connections to a communal TV aerial and satellite aerials or distribution cables may be available from previous tenancy. Tenants will be responsible for checking condition and arranging preferred supplier.

Heating and Water Services

- Mains water and gas stopcocks will be clearly labelled.
- All installations for the supply of water, hot and cold, and heating and ventilation systems will have been checked, free from blockages and in good working order.
- All radiators and storage heaters will be fixed secure.
- Arrangements can be made for boiler and timeclock instructions, storage heater or solar panel operating instructions to be issued. Tenants will be offered a demonstration when the gas service is recommissioned.

Detection Equipment

- All smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors will be tested and replaced if necessary. Batteries or the complete unit will be renewed as necessary.
- The Association tests these annually, tenants are encouraged to run their own regular tests, monthly as a minimum.

Windows

- Glass panes will be complete and free from cracks and significant scratches.
- All windows will be checked to ensure that they open and close properly and are secure.
- All window locks will be working and have keys.

Doors

- All flat / house entrance doors will be secure with door, surrounds, thresholds and ironmongery in good condition.
- Glass panes will be complete and crack free.
- All external entrance doors should have a letter box. All letter boxes, spy-holes and chains will be checked and replaced as necessary.
- Door chains will not be permitted in all retirement schemes due to master key entry systems.
- Internal doors will be undamaged and in presentable order with door, surrounds, thresholds and ironmongery in good condition.

Keys and Locks

- One lock on each of the property's ground floor entrance doors or main entrance door of upper flats will have been changed for a new tenancy (excluding retirement housing).
- Two complete sets of house keys will be supplied to the tenant.
- Keys will also be provided for stair entrance door, back green door, bin store / pram store, car park, meter cupboard and window locks.
- Fobs will be provided for door entry systems, and for retirement housing to access the community building and laundry.
- Keys/fobs will be supplied with written identification labels.

Bathrooms

- Baths, basins and WCs will be clean and substantially free from chips, staining or burn marks.
- Where a shower is provided it will be in good working order and electrically safe.
- Shower screens or shower curtains will be provided. Shower screens will be clean and stain free and replaced as necessary. Shower curtains, flexi hose and spray head will be renewed.
- Tiling and seals will be of a reasonable standard, tiling should be free from cracks and paint.
- Taps will be free to turn with washers in place.
- WC seats will be renewed.
- Baths and wash hand basins will have plug fitted.

Kitchens

- Sinks, worktops and units will be clean and free from grease, inside and out, and substantially free from chips or staining.
- Tiling and seals will be of a reasonable standard, tiling should be free from cracks and paint.
- Taps will be free to turn, with washers in place.
- Sinks will have plug fitted.
- All white goods to be removed from property, with the exception of built goods such as hob, oven, refrigerator or washing machine.
- A minimum of 1.0 m³ of enclosed storage space will be provided either in the form of traditional larder cupboard or fitted units.
- Washer / drier appliance will be supplied in certain modern complexes where traditional garden drying facilities are not available.

Stairs / Steps / Handrails

- All stair and step treads / risers will be level and free from trip hazards.
- All banisters will be in place and fixed secure.
- Internal balustrading will be sized in line with child safety requirements.
- Any handrails or grab rails will be fixed secure.

Flooring and floor coverings

- All floor boards will be level and free from trip hazards.
- Floor coverings in wet floor shower rooms will be clean and free from any rips or significant staining.

Insulation / Energy Efficiency

- Gas boiler or electric storage heating system will be less than 20 years old.
- Attic spaces will have a minimum of 100mm insulation, tanks and pipes will be insulated.
- Hot water cylinders, where available will have tank jackets. Cavities will be insulated.
- Where insulation does not meet this standard the property will be placed on an existing programme and upgrade work undertaken within an agreed timescale.

External Works

- External painterwork will be included in the Associations regular 7 year cyclical programme.
- The roof and flashings will be in good condition, structurally sound and water tight with no evidence of slipped tiles or slates.
- Gutters and downpipes will be free from blockages. If plant growth is visible the property will be added to the existing gutter clearance programme and work undertaken within an agreed timescale.

Gardens

- For new tenancies, footpaths, walkways and allocated bin stores, will be swept and clear of refuse, garden and contractors debris.
- During the growing season grass will have been cut within 4 weeks prior to tenancy sign-up.
- Trees and shrubs will not cause blockage to any footpath, walkway or be overgrown into neighbouring properties.
- Gates, if available, will be checked to ensure they open and close properly and are secure.
- Fencing, if available, will provide continuous boundary demarcation with no sharp extrusions on either side.
- Clothes poles or rotary drier hole, shall be in place and secure.

Tenant Alterations

- Permission should be sought for any alterations to the property.
- The Association operates a scheme to award compensation for certain specific improvements, at the end of a tenancy. Detailed conditions apply and are listed in the Policy on Compensation for Improvements.

Asset Management and Repairs – Key Processes

Action	Timescale
Pre-termination notice: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check status of EPC, Asbestos report, planned maintenance of main components 2. Request Asbestos report, 3. Check alterations & improvements granted and adaptations 	} Within 1 working day } } } }
Pre-termination inspection: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attend pre-termination inspection if requested / known reason 	<i>As requested</i>
Receipt of keys from Neighbourhood Services: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fit key safe, take meter reads and supply LED lightbulbs 2. Where debt on meter - arrange credit for meters 3. Access for asbestos certification, if necessary 	Within 1 working day <i>Minimum 1 working day</i> <i>2 working days minimum to 8 working days</i>
Undertake Void Pre Inspection: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gas termination visit and Energy Performance Certification (EPC) if necessary 2. Inspect and instruct void works and set void décor allowance 3. Instruct Contractor, electric check, any property clearance works and all void works 	} Within 1 working day } } } Within 6 working days <i>(additional time required if property clearance)</i>
Agree and instruct any additional Planned Maintenance works	<i>Timescale to be agreed – Asset Management, Contractor and Neighbourhood Services</i>
Final inspection of Contractor Works: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inspect and accept contractor works 2. Confirm property meets Letting Standard 3. Take meter reads, arrange display of EPC and removal of key safe 4. Keys returned to Asset Management and void signed off 	} Within 1 working day } } } } <i>(additional time required if Contractor Works are not satisfactory)</i>
Return keys to Neighbourhood Services: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Return keys 2. Clarify recharges on previous tenancy 	Within 1 working day
Specific information to new tenant: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to utility supplier 2. Information relating to Asbestos 3. Any programmed works and agree timescales 4. Any future work programmes 5. Status of property with regard to SHQS and ESSH 6. Release void décor allowance 	Prepared for allocation date

Update Asset Database: 1. Electric Check 2. EPC 3. Component Upgrades	Within 1 working week of void works inspection
Monitor : 1. Gas recommission date	Until new tenant has instructs

Note: varying timescales will apply where:

- Asbestos certification has been requested
- a property clearance is required before void contractor works can commence
- planned maintenance works such as gas central heating or kitchen upgrade are required on the void period
- contractor fails to perform the works satisfactorily or within timescale

Neighbourhood Services – Key Timescales

Action	Timescale
Respond to notification of termination	Within 1 working day
Pre-termination inspection	Within 5 working days
Advertise property	Within 3 working days (or by next available void edition)
Shortlist	Within 1 working day of edition closing
Interview/preliminary offer	Within 3 working days
Viewing	Within 3 working days of key return (or before key return if access available)
Sign-up	Within 5 working days of key return

Note: varying timescales will apply where a tenancy is terminated without 4 weeks' notice being received (for example, where the tenancy end is due to death or keys are returned without notice)