



**Drumchapel
Housing**

Co-operative Limited

Void Management Policy and Procedures

DRAFT

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Turnover of housing stock is an integral part of social housing provision which inevitably results in periods where properties are void. The Co-operative recognise that it is important to have an efficient management system to deal with void properties to reduce void rental loss, provide a quality service, meet housing need and achieve good estate management.
- 1.2 The management of void properties not only requires close liaison between the various parties involved within the Co-operative, but also with external bodies such as contractors, utility companies, nominating organisations, care agencies etc. It is therefore extremely important that good communications are established to ensure an efficient process in receiving, repairing and letting void properties. In recognition of this the Co-operative is committed to ensuring that all vacant properties are let as quickly as possible in accordance with this policy.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 It is important at the outset of this policy to define a number of terms for clarity, as these are used throughout the policy. The main terms are as follows and have been taken from the Scottish Housing Regulators, Social Housing Charter Guidance.
- **Voids** - A void is a property owned by a landlord that has no tenant at a point in time.
 - **Long term voids** - These are properties that are likely to be void longer than normally would be expected these properties are low demand properties, this may be due to their location, size, form, standard etc.
 - **Void period** - The void period is the time, measured in calendar days, between the date of termination of a previous tenancy or the date the property was repossessed to the start date of a new tenancy. Mutual exchanges, successions and other transfers are not to be reported as void properties.

3. Aims & Objectives

3.1 The overall aim of the Co-operative is to achieve efficient communication and liaison between all parties involved in the management of void properties to deliver the following objectives:

- Minimise void rental loss, void periods and void repair costs.
- Ensure effective, efficient and accountable management of void properties.
- Enable effective monitoring of void management and service delivery.
- Ensure that tenants are aware of their end of tenancy obligations, such as the need to give 28 days' written notice of their intention to leave the property.
- Reduce the impact of void properties on the overall environment of the Co-operative and on neighbouring residents.
- Prevent end of tenancy generated arrears (such as rechargeable repairs) wherever possible.
- Comply with legal duties, regulatory requirements and good practice standards.

4. Legislative framework

4.1 The Co-operative must comply with a number of different legislative requirements when dealing with void properties, including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
- The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) Wiring Regulations 18th Edition, BS 7671
- The Consumer Protection Act 1987
- Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2015
- Building Regulations and Building Standard (Scotland) Regulations 2004
- The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

5. Forms of void termination

5.1 Properties become void through the following ways and the treatment of the void property is affected by the form of termination:

- **Formal Termination** - Where the tenant gives 28 days written notice of their intention to leave the property.
- **Death of Tenant** - Where the Co-operative is notified of the death of a tenant and there is no successor to the tenancy.
- **Abandonment** - Where the Co-operative issues a legal notice to a tenant who has abandoned the property without notice.
- **Eviction** - Where the Co-operative has a Decree from the court to recover a property from the tenant.
- **Internal Transfers** - Where the tenant is re-housed in another of the Co-operative's properties.
- **Development Voids** - Where a new property is handed over to the RSL as complete but is not let to the tenant on the handover date.

5.2 While these different types of termination may involve slightly different processes of void management, most of the elements and stages will be similar. The following section details these.

6. Void stages

6.1 In the process of letting a property from one tenant to another there are several stages that need to be accomplished.

- Tenancy Termination Notice
- Pre-termination visit & property inspection.
- Tenant required works & repairs.
- Termination inspection & vacation of property
- Co-operative required repairs and terminating tenant rechargeable repairs.
- Accompanied Viewings
- Allocation & Occupancy

6.2 **Tenancy Termination** - This is most usually the result of notice being given by the tenant, but can also be the result of death, abandonment or eviction.

In the case of notice being provided, this time will be used to:

- Inspect the property due to be vacant.
- Advise the outgoing tenant of procedures at tenancy end (rent payments, services, keys etc).
- Encourage (and for certain items, require) the outgoing tenant to leave the property in a reasonable condition (removing their possessions, cleaning up, decoration).
- Obtain feedback from the outgoing tenant about reasons for leaving through the end of tenancy form.
- Start the process of finding a new tenant.

6.3 **Tenancy Termination Notice** - Tenants are required to give the Co-operative 28 days notice of terminating their tenancy. The Co-operative requires this notice in writing, signed by the tenant (and the joint tenant where there is one). As soon as the tenant advises the Co-operative of their wish to terminate their tenancy an end of tenancy form will be issued to the tenant(s). If the tenant phones to advise the Co-operative their intention to terminate their tenancy, staff will complete the termination form(s) and issue to the tenant(s) for signing.

Upon receipt of the notice of tenancy termination, a termination confirmation letter will be issued which states that a pre-termination visit & property inspection is required.

For the most effective use of this pre-termination time staff should use the notice period to:

- Assess the property condition at pre-termination inspection.
- Agree with the tenant work to be done and repairs to be made to end the tenancy satisfactorily, allowing the tenant the opportunity to have the work completed to a professional standard before the end of tenancy.
- Informing the outgoing tenant of their end of tenancy responsibilities.
- Interview new applicants or arrange a transfer of tenancy.
- Attempt to arrange with the outgoing tenant viewing arrangements for possible incoming tenant (s).
- Advise housing benefit of expected termination date if applicable.

6.4 **Selection of New Tenant** - Upon notice to terminate being received, action shall progress to re-let the property in accordance with the Co-operatives allocation policy.

6.5 **Pre-termination visit & property inspection** - The purpose of the pre-termination inspection is to ascertain the general condition of the property, advise the tenant what is required to end the tenancy satisfactorily and remind

them of their rights and responsibilities at the end of tenancy. This should be carried out within 10 working days of the notice of termination to allow adequate time for the process outlined below to take place.

It can also allow the Co-operative to check whether the tenant is willing to allow prospective tenants to view the property prior to their departure and enable arrangements to be made which can considerably reduce the void period.

At the pre-termination inspection the staff member should complete an end of tenancy inspection using the inspection form and checklist

This visit should advise the outgoing tenant (s) of procedures at tenancy end, including:

- Advise tenant(s) of rent and rechargeable payments due to be made.
- Request that the tenant provides details of their current utility companies.
- Remind the tenant of the need to advise external agencies of their tenancy termination, e.g. utility companies, council tax, DWP etc.
- Remind the tenant of their responsibility to leave the property in a reasonable condition (removing their possessions, cleaning up and decoration), specifically highlight that the tenant may be recharged if any clearance or cleaning work is required to ensure the property can be let.
- Advise the tenant that if the Co-operative is required to carry out reinstating or repair work, they may be recharged for the cost of work. If the tenant feels unable to do such reinstatement work, an agreement may be made for the Co-operative to make the property good and recharge the tenant with payment due in advance of termination date. Where there is credit on the rent account, this should be returned to the outgoing tenant following the void inspection, to take account of any rechargeable repairs that may be due.
- Discuss arrangements for access to carry out repair work, prior to termination, if possible.
- Establish if accompanied viewings can be progressed with perspective tenants in the pre-termination period.
- Confirm any rights to compensation for improvements that have been carried out (The Secure Tenants (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 2002 and the Housing Scotland Act 2001).
- Obtain feedback, including reasons for leaving.

6.6 **Tenant required works & repairs** - The tenants will be advised at the pre-termination inspection of repairs that they are required to carry out before they leave, with details confirmed in writing.

If the tenant is unable to carry out the required work themselves, they can request that the Co-operative undertakes the work as a rechargeable repair.

- 6.7 **Viewings & provisional allocation** - After termination details have been confirmed with the outgoing tenant, an offer of housing should be made to the successful applicant in accordance with the allocations policy.

If the existing tenant has agreed, and the staff member deem it appropriate, an accompanied viewing may be carried out during the 28-day notice period, whilst the existing tenant is still resident.

- 6.8 **Pre-organised standard re-let repair work** - following the pre-termination inspection the standard re-let repair work can be pre-organised for the afternoon of the day that the keys are to be returned to the Co-operative (or the following working day if this is not possible). Such works includes:

- Lock change.
- Asbestos renovation & demolition survey, when required.
- Gas service safety check.
- Fire protection equipment test.
- Electrical Inspection Condition Report.
- Energy performance certificate (EPC) when required.
- Legionella check when required.

- 6.9 **Re-let repairs** - Repairs required to achieve the minimum lettable standard can be progressed in a number of ways, including:

- Undertaking some repair works prior to void stage.
- Non-essential repairs completed after the new tenant moves in.
- Providing redecoration allowances – in accordance with the Repairs and maintenance policy – helping to reduce void period.

6.9.1 Void works will be split into the following repair timescale categories:

- Void Repair 3 Days – For statutory checks, clear outs, cleans and small value repairs.
- Void Repairs 5 Days – For minor repairs works to the value of £1000.
- Void Repairs 10 Days – For substantial void repairs involving more than two trades. Over the value of £1000.

6.9.2 All essential repairs as detailed at section 6.8 will be carried out after the property becomes void. If the outgoing tenant returns the keys before the official termination date, essential repairs can be carried out once a lock change has been completed before the official termination date.

6.9.3 **Staff instructing void repair works should do so within their delegated authority values set out in the Financial Procedures & Financial Regulation documents.**

6.9.4 A detailed list of the Co-operatives void repair standard is contained at appendix A.

6.10 **Post tenancy end viewings** - where viewings could not be arranged prior to the end of the previous tenancy, these should be arranged as soon as possible, with consideration to health & safety and the condition of the property. All viewings should be accompanied by a member of staff and approved in advance by the Senior Maintenance Officer.

6.11 **Allocation & occupancy** - After a new tenant has accepted the offer of housing, keys should only be provided upon completion of the tenancy agreement and all appropriate paperwork. The new tenant will also be provided with:

- Copy of gas safety certificate
- Copy of the Fire Protection Test certificate.
- Copy of the Electrical Installation Condition Report (E.I.C.R)
- Copy of energy performance certificate
- Copy of the asbestos tenant information leaflet.
- Copy of the legionella tenant information leaflet.
- Operating instructions for heating system, together with other appliances, as appropriate

7. Termination without notice

7.1 Termination without notice may arise in the following circumstances:

- Keys returned without 4 weeks' notice
- Death of the tenant;
- Termination due to repossession action

7.2 **Keys returned anonymously without 4 weeks' notice** - Where the keys of a property are handed in without any prior notice, this property should be treated as abandoned, in accordance with the Abandoned Tenancy policy.

7.3 **Keys returned without 4 weeks' notice** - In this situation the provision of keys will initiate the notice period and the tenant will remain responsible for the rent over this period. In these circumstances, where possible, agreement should be sought to access the property to carry out pre-void repairs in anticipation of the property becoming void.

7.4 **Death of a tenant** - Where a tenant dies leaving no successors, the Co-operative needs to consider a number of sensitive issues, such as how long to allow relatives to clear the property and whether to charge to recover void losses for any of the period following the tenants' death.

- **Tenancy end date** - When we receive notification of the death of a tenant, where no person qualifies to succeed the tenancy, a period of up to two weeks (without charge) should be allowed for the house to be cleared. The Senior Housing Officer has the discretion to extend the period allowed to clear the house by a maximum of two further weeks, to take account of individual circumstances. Any period beyond this this will only be granted where the previous tenant's estate confirms in writing that they will cover the rent for this period.
- **Succession of tenancy** – where a qualified person exists, succession of tenancy will be progressed in accordance with the Co-operative's Allocation policy.

7.5 **Death of a tenant with no next of kin** – Where there is no next of kin the estate legally becomes ownership of the Government.

In cases of a suspicious death or where no next of kin or relatives are involved, the Police may be involved. The Co-operative will work in partnership with the Police, Glasgow City Council and any other relevant agencies. No possessions will be disposed of until authorised by the relevant agency.

7.6 **Termination due to re-possession action** – Where this takes place the date for repossession, as determined by the court/ abandonment procedure.

7.7 **Abandonment** - Where a tenancy is abandoned the abandoned house procedure should be followed, including arrangements for access, provision of inventory, storage of belongings and recharges as appropriate.

7.8 **Framework for processing void properties** - As stated previously, the key activities in managing voids are:

- Tenancy termination notice
- Pre-termination visit and property inspection.
- Identification and completion of any work to the property
- Identification of a new tenant
- Letting & occupation

To minimise void timescales and reduce rent loss these activities should be progressed in tandem, where possible, with a particular focus on pre-termination activities.

8. External influences

8.1 There are a number of external factors that may have an effect on the length of time a property lies void. Difficulties that can arise in relation to voids are:

- High Turnover
- Low demand properties
- Utility meter replacements.
- Unforeseen planned maintenance works.

These problems may result from:

- lack of demand/need (for an area, property type, property size, property condition)
- lengthy repair periods (where major repairs are being carried out or if contractors require to order goods)
- Vandalism or anti-social behavior

8.2 Where external factors impact upon performance, joined up approaches will be required to consider and develop effective strategies.

9. Security and safety

9.1 **Security measures** - In some areas and properties it is important to recognise the need to secure the property to prevent vandalism, theft, squatting or other problems. The need for security for a property can vary enormously between property types and location. The need to secure the property has to be weighed against the perception that this can create for existing and potential tenants.

As such, the type and level of security should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

9.2 **Winter voids** - It is important to ensure that winter voids are properly managed in order to prevent frost and/or flood damage, which could considerably add to the repair cost and the void period.

The need to take action to protect void properties in the winter varies enormously between property types, ages and different locations. At the void inspection the decision should be made whether to:

- Employ specific frost precaution measures.
- Monitor the weather over the winter/void period and review the required action as a result.
- Decide that the property will not require frost precautions to be taken due to its location, type or likely length of void period.

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Frost and flood precautions include:

- Conducting regular inspections.
- Draining down of any water supply pipes and water heating systems.
- Keeping on timed low level heating a couple of times a day, or on permanently during cold spells.

10. Utilities

10.1 Effectively managing utilities during the void process is essential to ensure that:

- Void works can be progressed quickly.
- Meters are reset or replaced as quickly as possible.
- Accounts are managed and billed correctly.
- New tenants are provided with appropriate guidance and support to access competitive tariffs and alternative energy suppliers.

10.2 To achieve this, we will work with British Gas Void Portal who specialise in this area, facilitating meter services and providing advice to tenants.

11. Performance monitoring & service improvement

11.1 The policy will be monitored on a continual basis to ensure that the service continues to meet the changing needs of our tenants and provides excellent value for money. This is achieved by:

- Obtaining customer feedback when new tenants move in.
- Scheduled customer surveys.
- Tenants panel meetings and consultation events.
- Assessing and learning from complaints.
- Scrutinising invoices and comparing the performance of contractors.
- Comparing performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- Benchmarking our performance against other Scottish Registered Social Landlords.
- Internal audit arrangements.
- Examining and sharing best practice through peer groups and forums, including Quality and Efficiency Forum, West of Scotland Housing Forum and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.

11.2 Key areas of performance will be reported to the Management Board quarterly and communicated to tenants through our website, newsletters, the Annual Report to Tenants and other appropriate methods.

12. Record keeping and reporting

- 12.1 Comprehensive records will be retained within the Co-operative's housing management system (SDM). This will include processes and associated timescales, works completed, customer feedback, cost and contractor information, together with copies of documentation/certification.
- 12.2 The housing management module will accommodate reporting against the Scottish Social Housing Charter and key performance Indicators. It will also provide reports on contractor performance and business intelligence to assist strategic decision making. All data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

13. Tenant incentives

- 13.1 The Co-operative will provide tenant's incentives, where appropriate to assist the allocation of void properties. These may be made available, where a considerable amount of decoration is required and or a property has been refused on this basis. Incentives will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and may include a decoration allowance in accordance with the Repair and Maintenance Policy.
- 13.2 The Co-operative will continue to explore ways to enhance our service and ensure that properties are let timeously. Any new initiatives will be approved by the Management Board, prior to introduction.

14. Advertising voids

- 14.1 The Co-operative operates a Choice-based Allocations policy. This involves advertising our properties available to housing register applicants on our website and Facebook page. Applicants who may not have online access can request paper copies of property schedules, only those properties which meet their housing need will be sent.

15. GDPR

- 15.1 The Co-operative will gather and use certain information about individuals in accordance with UK GDPR. Staff members have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the terms of the privacy policy and to collect, handle and store personal information in accordance with relevant legislation. The Fair Processing Notice (FPN) details how personal data is held and processed with third parties in accordance with relevant policies and procedure.

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APPENDIX A

This checklist outlines the minimum standard which all Drumchapel Housing Co-operative properties must meet to be relet.

| | Please Tick (√) |
|--|-----------------|
| The property is wind and watertight. | |
| The property is safe and secure. | |
| The property is clean and cleared of previous tenant's personal belongings including loft space. | |
| The garden is neat and tidy and cleared of all rubbish. | |
| Doors and windows have been inspected and are in good working order. | |
| Gas and electrical supplies are checked and in good working order. | |
| Internal glazing intact and compliant with safety standards. | |
| There will be no polystyrene tiles in the property. | |
| The property has a functioning bath and/or shower, toilet and wash-hand basin with plug and chains intact. If a shower unit in place this will be included in the electrical check & legionella check. The shower must have a shower screen, rail and curtain. | |
| Works Minimum Lettable Standard Kitchen Units - All kitchen units will be thoroughly checked, repaired or replaced, as necessary. All worktop veneers which have excessive damage should be replaced – worktops with indentations or knife marks will not be replaced or repaired. | |
| Fire protection alarms and any other alarms are in working order. | |
| Extractor fans are operational. | |
| Floors will be checked, and all loose and missing floorboards will be secured or replaced. In extreme cases 6mm plywood will be fitted to the surface. | |
| Woodwork (skirting, facings, door checks) are intact. | |
| Handrails and banisters are safe. | |
| Plaster on walls and ceilings has been checked. | |
| There is no major works required (fire, flood, insurance etc.) | |
| A minimum of 2 sets of keys are given to new tenant. | |
| Installations by former tenants will be left if they are safe and the new tenant is prepared to accept responsibility* for future maintenance. | |
| *You should ensure that a disclaimer has been signed and copy filed in house file. | |

RELET DISCLAIMER

I have signed this disclaimer to confirm that I am prepared to take responsibility for the future maintenance of _____ that was installed by the previous tenant and will not expect Drumchapel Housing Co-operative to carry out any repairs. I understand that I have a period of 7 days from today to change my mind and accept that to remove and install a new item will be carried out as a routine repair.

| | Signature | Date |
|-----------------|-----------|------|
| Tenant | | |
| Housing Officer | | |

APPENDIX B

Void Policy – Operational Procedures

Stage 1 – Notification Of End of Tenancy

- On notification of termination of tenancy from the Housing Department the Asset Management Officer (AMO) will contact the outgoing tenant to arrange a pre-term inspection.
- Should the AMO be unable to contact the outgoing tenant, a letter should be sent with a date and time of the pre-term inspection. The AMO should also inform the Housing Department of the arrangement.
- Details of the pre-term inspection and any letters sent should be recorded as diary notes on SDM.

Stage 2 – Pre-term Inspection

- Pre-term inspection should be carried out in accordance with 6.5 of the Void Management Policy.
- A pre-term inspection form should be completed at time of visit and form part of the void paperwork.
- AMO should arrange in advance any works identified at the pre-term inspection for the termination date.
- AMO assisted by the Estate Caretaker should submit a stage 1, new void request to the British Gas Void Portal.

Stage 3 – Void Keys Received

- On receipt of the keys AMO should carry out the void inspection, using the void inspection form. This should happen no later than 24 hours after receiving the notification of the keys being received.
- During the void inspection the AMO should identify both authorised and unauthorised alterations to the property. Any alteration being left in the property should be identified to the Housing department for relet disclaimer proposes at sign up.
- The AMO should refer to the minimum letting standard when assessing and instructing works.
- Any works the AMO feels could go over their delegated authority within the Finance Procedures & Regulations should be quoted for by the contractor before seeking approval from the Senior Maintenance Officer.
- All works should be instructed to contractors via a work order on SDM no later than 24 hours after inspection unless a quote has been requested.
- The AMO should take the utility meter readings and meter serial numbers (gas & electric) from the property and add the details to the British Gas Portal (Stage 2) assisted by the Estate Caretaker. The responsibility for the utility readings and the British Gas Portal remains with the AMO.
- The AMO should liaise with contractors when works are issued, and in progress, and update the Housing Department on likely timescales of the void works being completed.

Stage 4 – Completions Of Void

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- On notification of completion of works the AMO should carry out a post-inspection of all works ensure void minimum letting standard has been achieved and record on SDM.
- The AMO should take final utility readings assisted by the Estate Caretaker.
- Once satisfied the AMO will collate the void certificates and issue to the Housing Team as set out on section 6.11 of the Void Management Policy.
- On receipt of the new tenants details the AMO assisted by the Estate Caretaker will complete stage 3 of the British Gas Void Portal.

Stage 5 – Quarterly Void Stats

- The AMO will collate void stats for each quarter of the financial year as follows:
 1. Total number of voids for the period.
 2. Average number of days to complete voids for the period.
 3. Average cost of completed voids for the period.