

Policy no.	KF50
Policy title	Voids policy & procedure
Date of review	Feb 2021
Date of next review	Feb 2023
Department	Property Services

VOIDS POLICY & PROCEDURE

Approved by

Approved Date Feb 2018

Version no.

Review Date: Feb 2023

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NEHEMIAH UCHA HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD (NUCHA)

VOID PROPERTIES - POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 It is our policy to:

- re-let vacant (void) properties as quickly as possible,
- minimise our costs in bringing void properties up to an acceptable letting standard, and
- minimise the loss of rental income as a result of properties being

empty, subject to:

- Properties being in an acceptable condition for occupation, and
 - all offers of tenancy complying with our POLICY

1.2 Voids may arise for the following reasons:

- **Formal termination** - where a tenant gives notice in writing of their intention to end their tenancy of the property;
- **Abandonment** - where a tenant leaves the property without any notice and the Association has to follow a prescribed process to re-possess the property;
- **Eviction** – where a property is legally re-possessed and the tenant removed, following the granting of a Decree by the Court;
- **Death – where** the tenant dies and there is no-one to succeed to the tenancy as currently defined in law;
- **Transfer** – where the tenant moves to another NUCHA property.

The action that we will take in each of these situations is covered by the procedures that support this policy (see Appendix 1 for current list of supporting procedures).

1.3 As part of our efforts to minimise voids times and costs we will remind tenants, both at the start of their tenancy as well as during the settling-in visit and regularly thereafter, e.g. through the Tenant's Handbook and tenant newsletters, that they should give 28 days' written notice of their intention to end their tenancy.

1.4 This policy and supporting procedures comply with Performance standard which states:

Void management- *We monitor demand for our houses and maximise the use of available housing, keeping empty properties and spaces in our shared accommodation to a minimum. We make sure our properties are of an appropriate lettable standard.*

2.0 VOIDS TARGETS

2.1 As part of the annual setting of budgets and performance targets, the Board of

Management will approve targets for:

- a) the total number of void days between a property becoming vacant and it being re-occupied:
 - i) Where the property is being let to a mainstream tenant with no involvement of either Community Networks staff or other support providers;
 - ii) where the property is being let to a tenant requiring support provided by Community Networks staff or by other support providers, and a support package requires to be agreed with a funding authority;
- b) the maximum average time for repairing properties between lets for (i) routine repairs and (ii) complex repairs;
- c) The maximum average no. of days to identify a new tenant and have an offer accepted;
- d) The maximum amount of rental income lost as a result of void properties – expressed as a percentage of the estimated annual total rental income – agreed as part of the annual budget-setting process.

The current targets are listed in Appendix 2 to this policy.

2.2 Where there are exceptional circumstances affecting the future use of a property or the length of time it will take to bring the property back to a lettable standard, e.g. because of serious fire or flood damage, or a delay in finalising a funding package for a tenant requiring support, the Finance Director will have delegated authority to approve the removal of the rent charge from that property, in accordance with current procedures.

3.0 LETTING

STANDARDS

- 3.1 We will aim to ensure that all vacant properties are brought up to our current Lettings Standards (Appendix 3) before they are re-let. Where certain items covered by the standards are due to be improved within a reasonable time as part of current planned maintenance programmes the new tenant will be given the appropriate information.

Decoration

- 3.2 Internal decoration is normally the tenant's responsibility. However where the internal condition of a void property would adversely affect the time taken to re-let it, we will consider either carrying out some decoration or providing the incoming tenant with a decoration allowance, in accordance with current procedures.

4.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The procedures supporting this policy will include measures to mitigate the risks relating to the management of void properties, as listed in the current Risk Map.
- 4.2 We will ensure that we re-let properties in a safe and habitable condition, complying with all current statutory legislation relating to our activities as a landlord and in particular with the regulations governing the completion of safety checks on gas and electrical installations and services.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

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

6.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- 6.1 The Housing Services Manager is responsible for ensuring that this policy and the procedures that support it are implemented when required.
- 6.2 The Housing Services Manager will report on our performance against current voids targets as part of the regular reporting arrangements to each meeting of the Housing Sub-Committee.

6.3 The Housing Services Manager will ensure that the Housing & Property Services Sub- Committee reviews the voids targets annually, and this policy at least every three years.

7.0 Equality impact Assessment

7.1 Was a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) required? Yes

7.2 When was the EIA conducted and by whom?

The EIA was conducted by Corporate Services Manager on 28 January 2021

APPENDIX 1

PROCEDURES CURRENTLY SUPPORTING THE VOID PROPERTIES POLICY

Absconds (Abandonment)

Decoration allowances

Mutual exchanges

Void procedures

Lettings Policy

VOIDS POLICY - PERFORMANCE TARGETS

Item	Target
1. Overall maximum length of a void period	
a) property let to a mainstream tenant routine repairs	5 days
b) property let to a mainstream tenant – complex repairs	10 days
c) property let to a tenant requiring support routine repairs	5 days
d) property let to a tenant requiring support complex repairs	10 days

Item	Target
2. Average no. of days for repairing void properties	
Routine repairs	5 days
Complex repairs	10 days

Item	Target
3. Maximum average no. of days to identify a new tenant and have an offer accepted	
a) where the property is let to mainstream with no support	28 days
b) where a property is let to a tenant requiring support	28 days

[Note: 'Days' means calendar days, not working days.]

Item	Target
4. Maximum amount of rent loss due to voids	0.21% of rent

Appendix 3

LETTING STANDARDS

This document sets out the standards we aim to achieve in every void property before it is occupied by a new tenant. The incoming tenant will be given a checklist based on these standards to confirm the checks and work that have been carried out during the voids period. This is the standard in which we will expect the property to be returned to us when the tenant ends their tenancy (subject to normal 'wear and tear').

GENERAL ITEMS

Standard 1: Cleanliness & tidiness

- The property, including any loft, cellar, garden area, external shed or other outbuilding, is clear of all items, rubbish etc. left by the former tenant.
- Kitchen and bathroom surfaces have been washed down.
- The property is in an acceptably clean and 'move in' standard.

Standard 2: Repairs

- All repairs are completed before the new tenant moves in, with the exception of repairs delayed by circumstances beyond our control and agreement on those repairs that may be completed after the new tenancy starts, and there are no health and safety issues.

Standard 3: Alterations & improvements

- Any alterations and/or improvements carried out by the former tenant have either been approved by us and are to be left, or, if they have not been approved by us and are not up to our standard, have been removed and the property re-instated to an acceptable standard (costs charged to former tenant).

Standard 4: Medical adaptations

- All major medical adaptations, i.e. Stair lifts, wet floor/level access showers, access ramps, etc. have been checked and are operating to the required standard.
- If no new tenant requiring the current adaptations can be found, a decision has been made whether or not to remove one or more of the adaptations.

INTERNAL ITEMS

Standard 5: Electrical items

- All electrical fittings, services including the smoke and CO detectors, and any appliances, e.g. showers or cookers where provided, have been checked and a copy of the Periodical Inspection Report (PIR) for an Electrical Installation Certificate provided to the new tenant.
- Switches or sockets that are badly marked, covered by paint or affected by smoke have been replaced (costs may be charged to the former tenant).

Standard 6: Gas services

- Gas heating services and any gas appliances or services, including the CO detector, have had a gas safety check carried out, with a copy of the Landlord's Gas Safety certificate provided to the new tenant.

Standard 7: Water services

- The main stopcock is working and clearly labelled, and any other valves are working.
- All taps are operating correctly and not dripping.
- Immersion heaters, where fitted, are working and the switch is clearly labelled.
- Cold water tanks have a fitted lid, if in existence
- Drainage services are working correctly.

Standard 8: Ventilation

- Mechanical extract fans, where fitted, are clean and working correctly.

Standard 9: Doors

- All doors are intact, securely hung and operating properly.
- Bathroom and/or WC doors have a locking device openable from the outside

Standard 10: Stairs

- Stair treads, risers, banisters and handrails are safe, sound and secure.
- No sign of any active woodworm or rot.

Standard 11: Floors

- Floors are secure and free from any tripping hazard, with any loose or missing floorboards re-secured or replaced.
- No sign of any active woodworm or rot.
- Upper floor flats only: any laminate flooring has been removed (either by former tenant or costs charged to them).
- Non-slip flooring in bathrooms or kitchens (where provided) is in good condition with no gaps or cracks.

Standard 12: Woodwork, walls and ceilings

- All door or window frames, architraves, sills, skirting etc. are in place, in sound condition (undamaged), and with no sign of rot or infestation.
- All woodwork is either painted or varnished (i.e. no bare woodwork).
- All plasterwork is free from major defect and is suitable for decoration after reasonable preparation by the new tenant, i.e. no loose plaster or major cracks.

[Note: Where the existing decoration is very grubby and/or of poor quality, consideration may be given to offering a decoration allowance to the new tenant or NUCHA will arrange redecoration prior to relet.]

Standard 13: Bedroom wardrobes & cupboards

- Any fitted wardrobes and cupboards have at least one level shelf.
- A clothes rail is fitted, where appropriate.

Standard 14: Kitchens

- Kitchen units have been checked and all doors and drawers are operating properly.
- Worktops have been checked and are adequately sealed and not badly marked/damaged.
- Any units or worktops considered to be badly damaged and beyond economic repair have been replaced (where appropriate – costs charged to former tenant).
- Any wall cupboards are securely fixed.
- Kick plates and trims are in place.
- Where cookers and/or ovens are supplied by NUCHA, they have been cleaned and checked that they are operating correctly.

Standard 15: Bathrooms/Shower rooms

- All sanitary ware, baths and basins have been checked and are clean, free from rust, securely fixed, with plugs and free from major chips or cracks.
- Where one bathroom suite item is beyond economic repair, the whole suite has been replaced.
- Any shower provided is working properly and has a screen or shower curtain rail.
- All wall tiling and joints to baths and shower trays are sound and fully sealed.
- All grab rails (where fitted), toilet roll holders, cabinets and other wall-mounted items are securely installed

EXTERNAL ITEMS

Standard 16: Roofs, gutters and downpipes (visual inspection from ground level)

- There are no missing or slipped tiles or slates.
- Flashing is in position and secure.
- Gutters and downpipes are clear of rubbish and are sound and secure.

Standard 17: Brickwork, external walls

- External walls are sound, so as to prevent the likelihood of water penetration.
- No major visible defects.

Standard 18: Front and back doors

- External doors are securely hung, are wind and watertight and opening/closing freely.
- There is a functioning letterbox on all front doors.
- Any security items provided, e.g. spy holes or chains, are operating correctly.

Standard 19: Windows

- All windows are fully operational and safe to use, and have restrictors fitted.
- Window frames are sound and serviceable until due for redecoration under the cyclical painting programme.
- Where locks are fitted, window keys are available (any lock change due to missing keys will be charged to the former tenant).

Standard 20: Footpaths, ramps, external steps

- All footpaths, ramps and external steps to the front and rear entrances are sound, reasonably smooth and free from tripping hazards.
 - Any handrails fitted to external steps are securely fixed and reasonably smooth.
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Standard 21: Garden areas, gates & fencing

- Garden areas are clear of rubbish and any shed left in poor condition is removed (costs charged to former tenant).
- During the growing season, if required particularly as a result of a delay in re-letting the property, the grass is cut as a 'one off' at the start of the tenancy.
- Boundary fencing and gates provided by us are in reasonably sound condition and free from defects that might cause injury (subject to agreement with adjacent owners, where responsibility for boundary fencing is shared).
- Fencing installed by the former tenant that is in poor condition is removed and the boundary reinstated to the original standard (costs charged to former tenant).

Standard 22: Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

- A current EPC is fixed in a secure location before the property is re-let and the tenancy agreement is signed. [An EPC gives information about a property's theoretical energy performance and carbon emissions. It remains valid for ten years and can be used for all new tenants in that period. The tenant will be advised to contact the Energy Saving Trust (Tel: 0800 512 012) to obtain more information about energy efficiency measures.
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