

Void Management Policy

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Housing & Community Services Committee

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BIELD HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

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BIELD HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the Association's position on the management of voids.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This policy specifically covers rented supported housing, however where appropriate its terms will also be applied to shared or tenant equity housing and registered care housing.
- 2.2 The Association will deem a house void in the following circumstances:
- Where a tenant has formally terminated the tenancy by written notice,
 - On the death of a tenant where there is no successor in accordance with our Procedures on Succession,
 - By Abandonment of a Tenancy, where the appropriate legal notices have been served in accordance with our Procedures on Abandoned Houses,
 - By eviction where the Association has completed the relevant court action,
 - Following the hand over of a new scheme where the house has been completed but has not been allocated.
- 2.3 The Association view the effective management of voids as necessary to minimise rent loss and to assist in meeting housing needs as effectively as possible.
- 2.4 The Association will manage voids by having systems as described in the following sections, for terminating tenancies, inspecting and repairing voids, allocating voids, managing difficult to let houses and monitoring void management performance.

3 TERMINATING TENANCIES

- 3.1 Where a tenant, or their representative, indicates that they intend terminating a tenancy they will be given a termination of tenancy form and the leaflet – Ending a Tenancy, which provides information on the responsibilities of both the tenant and the Association.
- 3.2 The Association will accept both written notice of termination of tenancy and house keys at any of its offices or schemes.
- 3.3 Where the termination 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 representatives 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 representatives take longer than 14 days, the Association may make a charge for loss of rent and service charges for each day's rent lost to the Association beyond these 14 days.

For tenants moving outwith Bield properties, the notice period will be 28 days. A shorter notice period will only be accepted where the house can be re-let before the expiry of the notice period.

- 3.4 The Association will acknowledge receipt of a notification of tenancy termination within 7 days.
- 3.5 The Association will manage former tenant arrears or credit balances in accordance with our Rent Arrears Policy.
- 3.6 Where possible a pre termination inspection will take place to assess what work is required and to provide advice on clearing out the house, rechargeable repairs and compensation

for improvements. However as over ninety percent of houses become vacant due to a death or a move to further care, it is accepted that this will not often be possible.

- 3.7 The Association will notify Housing Benefit, Council Tax and Supporting People sections within Councils, of terminations of tenancy in accordance with its Guidance on Processing a Void.

4 INSPECTING AND REPAIRING VOIDS

- 4.1 Housing and Community Services will notify Property Services of terminations of tenancy in accordance with Guidance on Processing a Void.
- 4.2 Property Services will manage the void inspection and repair process in accordance with Guidance on Processing a Void.
- 4.3 Houses will only be re-let when they meet the minimum lettable standard as detailed in Appendix 1. Urgent or routine repairs will be carried out in accordance with normal time scales, and incoming tenants will be advised of the status of any outstanding repairs.
- 4.4 The Association may decide to enhance the minimum lettable standard for houses that are difficult to let to include additional works such as decoration and other minor improvements in accordance with its Guidance on Processing Difficult to Let Houses.
- 4.5 Tenants may be charged for repairs to damage caused wilfully, negligently or accidentally by the tenant or their visitor. A charge will not however be made without prior discussion with the tenant or their representative.
- 4.6 The Association expects tenants to make arrangements to have a house cleaned prior to handing in keys. Tenants will however only be charged for cleaning where intensive cleaning requires to be carried out to bring the property up to a re-lettable standard. A charge will not however be made without prior discussion with the tenant or their representative.
- 4.7 New tenants will receive a post allocation visit from their Property Officer within 21 days of them moving in to their house. The Property Officer will: -
- Check the standard of repairs carried out while the house was vacant,
 - Inspect the house to establish if any further repairs are required,
 - Establish tenant satisfaction levels,
 - Give advice on property related matters.
- 4.8 Where a house is vacant for more than one month it will be inspected at no less than monthly intervals to ensure that it remains secure, free from damage and wind and water tight.

5 ALLOCATION OF VOIDS

- 5.1 The allocation process will be initiated as soon as notification of a termination of tenancy is received, in accordance with Guidance on Processing a Void, and houses will be pre-allocated where possible.
- 5.2 Houses will be allocated in accordance with the relevant Allocation Policy for the house type.
- 5.3 Applicants will be contacted as soon as possible to establish their current position and interest level in the house available.

- 5.4 A written offer of tenancy will be made as soon as practicable, with a date of tenancy normally no later than two weeks after the date of written offer.
- 5.5 Applicants viewing houses will be accompanied by a member of staff familiar with the scheme and the area in which it is located.
- 5.6 The number of refusals and reasons for refusal will be recorded, analysed and reported to the Housing and Community Services Committee quarterly in accordance with the Allocation Policy.
- 5.7 New tenants will receive a post allocation visit from their Housing Officer within two months of them moving into their house. The Housing Officer will: -
 - Provide rent and benefits advice in accordance with our Rent Arrears Policy,
 - Check tenant satisfaction levels.

6 DIFFICULT TO LET HOUSES

- 6.1 The Association will identify schemes or house types within schemes, which are difficult to let. This will be done annually by identifying schemes with a limited housing list, and where the turnover and / or void loss is considerably higher than the average for the Association.
- 6.2 Where schemes or house types are identified as difficult to let action will be taken in accordance with Guidance on Processing Difficult To Let Houses.
- 6.3 A report will be presented annually to the Housing and Community Services Committee identifying difficult to let schemes or houses and detailing what actions may be appropriate, and these may include potential solutions and relevant costs.
- 6.4 The Association will use the information contained in the above report to implement measures, which will prevent houses becoming difficult to let in other schemes wherever possible.

7 VOID MONITORING

- 7.1 It is essential for voids to be monitored to enable the Association to take action to minimise the impact void loss has on the Association.
- 7.2 Overall void reports will be produced by Housing and Community Services on a monthly basis, these will list each void, grouped by scheme, whether re-let, the category of the void period, the value of void loss for each category and the total void loss for each void. The responsibility for monitoring these reports will be as follows:
 - For a Housing Officer area – Housing Officer / Allocation Officer / Assessment Officer,
 - For a Service Team area – Service Manager,
 - For Supported Housing – Assistant Director Supported Housing.
- 7.3 The following performance indicators will be set and will be published in the Association's Business Plan. These performance indicators will be reviewed each year as part of the business planning process:
 - Void period,
 - Rent loss,
 - Void turn around period for Property Services,
 - Void expenditure against approved annual budget.

7.4 An operational report for supported housing will be presented quarterly to the Housing and Community Services Committee and this will include the following information:

- The total value of void loss, and as a percentage of the rent due,
- The value of loss per category, and as a percentage of the rent due,
- The mean length of void, and the target,
- The medium void range,
- The turnover of stock,
- The above figures over five quarters,
- Any trends on the reasons for void loss levels.

7.5 An operational report will be presented quarterly to the Development and Property Services Committee and this will include the following information:

- Number of voids to which works were required,
- Budget for work,
- Cost of work,
- Average cost per void,
- Average number of days taken to complete works,
- The above figures for the preceding 2 years.

7.6 Reports will also be sent to Councils in accordance with Nomination Agreements and Homeless Person Protocols.

8 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

8.1 In the provision of housing and services the Association is committed to providing equality of opportunity for all irrespective of gender, race or disability and to support human rights for all.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY

9.1 Staff will work where appropriate in accordance with the Lone Working Policy when inspecting flats, carrying out accompanied viewing or applicant assessments.

9.2 All inspections and work to flats will be carried out in accordance with the guidance contained in the Health and Safety Manual.

10 INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION

10.1 Statistical information will be reported as follows:

- To the Partnership Forum annually,
- In the annual report (a copy of which will be sent to all tenants) annually,
- In the tenants' newsletter on an ad hoc basis.

10.2 On request the Association will provide information to tenants relating to our Void Management Policy.

10.3 All information held in respect of tenancies, will be processed in accordance with the our Data Protection and Confidentiality Policies.

11 MONITORING OF THE POLICY

11.1 The implementation of the policy will be monitored as follows:

- By the Housing and Community Services Committee and Development and Property Services Committee via quarterly operational reports,
- By the Assistant Director of Supported Housing via the quarterly report and other internal monitoring procedures as detailed in the Guidance on processing a Void,
- By the Assistant Director Property Services via the quarterly void report and other internal monitoring procedures detailed in the Guidance on Processing a Void.

12 REVIEW OF THE POLICY

- 12.1 The Void Management Policy will be reviewed on a five yearly basis.
- 12.2 Tenants will be involved in the review of the Void Management Policy in accordance with our Tenant Participation Strategy.

Revised February 2006

Bield Housing Association Limited

Minimum Lettable Standard for Void Houses

Cleanliness

Houses will be cleared of furniture and other items belonging to previous tenants, and left in a reasonable state of cleanliness.

Central Heating

All houses will have been provided with central heating.

Those with gas central heating boilers or other gas appliances will have a gas safety check carried out and a copy of the inspection certificate issued to the new tenant.

The electric central heating will be checked as part of the electrical installation.

Electrical Installation

The electrical installation will be checked and a copy of the certificate of inspection issued to the new tenant.

Cookers

In most houses the Association will provide an electric cooker which will be checked to see that it is working correctly.

CO detector

In houses with individual gas boilers, the Association will have fitted a carbon monoxide detector which if activated will cut off the gas supply. This will be checked as part of the gas safety check.

Smoke Alarm

A smoke detector will have been fitted in all houses and will be checked to ensure that it is operating correctly as part of the fire alarm or warden call system.

Warden Call/Door entry

The Association will have fitted, in all houses, a warden call system consisting of a speech unit and/or pullcords in each room. In some cases a door entry system will also have been provided. These systems will be checked to ensure that they are operating correctly.

Windows

All windows will be checked to ensure that they are fully operational and safe to use. Window keys will be available where locks are fitted.

Doors

Entrance doors to houses will have secure locks, door-closers, and letterboxes.

Other doors classified as fire doors will be fitted with door-closers, and bathroom doors will have a locking device.

All doors will be checked to see that they are working properly.

Badly damaged doors will be replaced.

Doors opening to the outside will be wind and watertight.

Kitchen

Kitchen units will be checked to ensure that doors and drawers are operating properly.

Worktops will be checked to make sure that they are adequately sealed and not badly damaged.

Any units or worktops considered to be badly damaged and beyond economic repair will be replaced.

Taps will be checked to ensure that they are working properly.

Slip-resistant flooring, where fitted, will be checked and replaced if badly damaged.

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Bathroom/Shower room

Sanitaryware will be checked and individual items will be replaced if badly cracked. Grab rails will be checked to ensure that they are secure to use. A shower, if already provided, will be checked to ensure that it is working properly. Any badly damaged tiling likely to cause water leaks will be replaced. Slip-resistant vinyl flooring will be checked and replaced if badly damaged.

Woodwork

Uneven flooring likely to cause a trip hazard or make carpet laying difficult will be repaired. Particularly squeaky floors will be attended to where possible. Other items of woodwork, such as skirtings and door facings, will be renewed if missing or badly damaged.

Decoration

The tenant is responsible for the decoration within the house. However, if the Association considers that the decoration is in a poor condition and likely to deter potential tenants, then all or parts of the house will be decorated, normally with one coat of paint or stain.

Communal Facilities & Services

The majority of the Association's houses are entered off communal areas and tenants have access to a range of communal facilities and services. The Association will manage, regularly inspect and service, and maintain these facilities as required to ensure that they remain safe and suitable for their uses.

External Areas

Garden areas, paths, drying greens, parking areas, and any other external grounds within the boundaries of the Association's property will be inspected and maintained on a regular basis to ensure that they are safe and suitable for their uses.

General Standard

The Association aims to maintain a generally high standard of housing and will therefore respond positively to requests for repairs that are considered appropriate and reasonable. In schemes where houses are considered potentially difficult to let, additional works may be carried out to void houses with a view to making them more lettable.

Requests for major repairs or improvements within any void house will need to be considered in conjunction with the Association's programme of replacement and upgrading of building components which is drawn up and implemented annually across the housing stock and which takes account of maintenance requirements, changing needs, and the life cycle of components.

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