

Void Management Policy

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1. Introduction

The Void Management Policy demonstrates how New Gorbals Housing Association (NGHA) manages vacant (void) properties, re-lets them as quickly as possible to minimise rent loss caused by properties being empty and adheres to our Lettable Standard (Appendix 1).

2. Policy Aims & Objectives

The Association will seek to minimise the time that a property is left empty recognising that an empty home is associated with:

- Lost rental income to the Association
- A lost chance to provide housing to a household in housing need
- A potential target for vandalism resulting in increased costs and safety concerns for neighbours;
- The danger of physical deterioration resulting in increased costs; and
- A negative image of the area – in particular for immediate neighbours.

NGHA are committed to maximising its rental income and making the best use of the available stock, through efficient and effective control of voids.

NGHA's main source of income is derived from rents and service charges and therefore steps need to be taken to minimise the length of time between tenancies, whilst ensuring sensitive lettings to sustain a balanced community. The Void Management Policy has been developed to ensure that good performance is achieved.

Good void management is based on Housing and Maintenance Services jointly managing the process effectively and working with the outgoing tenant as necessary, with other internal teams and external agencies. It involves dealing with three key areas:

- Tenancy termination
- Identification and completion of any work to the property
- Letting and occupation

To achieve the above objectives the Association will aim to ensure:

- Outgoing tenants are aware of their responsibilities prior to their termination date in order that void repair costs are kept to a minimum;
- Minimise the loss of rental income by carrying out void repairs and reletting the properties as economically and efficiently as possible;
- Maximise the opportunity to meet housing need by allocating properties effectively as possible;
- Minimise the number of offers made before a house is let;

- Continually improve the service through regular review of the void process, taking account of the views of residents, particularly new tenants;
- To provide the Management Committee with the necessary information that assists them to effectively monitor void performance;
- NGHA complies fully with legal duties, contractual and regulatory requirements and good practice standards;
- NGHA's properties are allocated in the same high lettable standard;
- NGHA's financial stability and viability is protected;
- NGHA's properties remain desirable and in high demand;
- Other related policies and procedures complement and support the aims and objectives of the Void Management Policy;
- Void costs are minimised whilst not compromising the Association's standards;
- NGHA continues to meet the demand and expectations of potential tenants regarding the standard of accommodation offered;
- There is a clear statement of NGHA's service and standards in relation to void properties.

3. Expected Outcomes

Key outcomes of operating an effective Void Management Policy include:

- Ensuring that properties are well maintained, safe, secure and in line with the SHQS;
- Ensuring that properties are warm, insulated, fuel efficient and compliant with EESSH;
- Optimising customer satisfaction with service delivery; and
- Delivering value for money

4. Pre-Termination Arrangements

Tenants are generally required to give us 28-days' notice that they are intending to end their tenancy. Our void management process commences as soon as we get notice of a vacant property and receive a written tenancy termination. At which point we will arrange to carry out a pre-termination inspection of the property.

Our pre-termination inspection allows us to inspect the condition of the property as well as provide advice to the outgoing tenant. This will include confirming when keys are to be handed in, requirements in relation to house clearance, arrangements for meter readings, identification of any outstanding rent or rechargeable repairs, etc. We expect outgoing tenants to leave their property completely cleared of all furniture and floor coverings; be cleaned and in good condition and to provide us with a forwarding address so that we can follow up on any queries.

There will be circumstances where we do not receive notice and where it is not possible to carry out a pre-termination visit, such as where the tenant has died; where a property has been abandoned by the former tenant or where the former tenant has

been evicted. In these cases, our aim will be to have keys returned or have locks changed as quickly and as practically possible so that the property can be relet without undue delay.

5. Death of a Tenant

In cases where the property has become empty due to the death of a tenant the Housing Officer will contact the next of kin or nominated person for a copy of the death certificate and to discuss the timescale for the property to be cleared and return of keys.

In such cases, a period of 4 weeks should be allowed for the house to be cleared. The Association recognises the difficulties and sensitivities associated with clearing the belongings of a deceased person. In cases where the property cannot be cleared by relatives the Association will seek the earliest return of the keys to ensure the Association can commence void repair work with minimum further delay.

On occasions there may be an estate which is being administered by a solicitor. The Association will liaise with the appointed solicitor to obtain the return of the keys at the earliest opportunity.

6. Abandoned Properties

The Association has clear procedures for dealing with properties that are believed to have been abandoned.

A property is abandoned where:

- the house is unoccupied; and
- the tenant does not intend to occupy it as their principal home.
- the tenant has not followed the termination process as stated in their tenancy agreement.

More information about abandonments is detailed in our Estate Management Policy.

7. Void Repairs

We inspect all our empty properties to assess their condition, suitability for reletting and instruct any essential repairs.

All our properties require to be wind and watertight, safe and secure, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and energy efficient by achieving the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH).

Our Lettable Standard (Appendix 1) sets out the type of repair work that will be carried out for a property to be ready for let and information on the level of decoration required.

Planned programme renewals will generally be carried out when the property is occupied to coincide with the approved investment timetable in accordance with the Association's planned maintenance programme. However, in certain circumstances it may be more expedient to carry out planned programme renewals when a property is void – there is discretion to do so where it is financially viable and where this has been agreed by the Head of Maintenance.

8. Selection & Allocation of Void Properties

We will generally commence the allocation process as soon as we have formal notification of a void property. The selection of potential tenants and allocation of properties will be carried out strictly in accordance with our Housing Allocation Policy.

Where possible, we will pre-allocate void properties. Where we have identified an interested applicant, we will notify them by phone as soon as keys are available for viewing. In all cases, the viewing will be carried out accompanied by a member of the Housing Services Team. However, there is discretion for us to carry out viewings prior to the previous tenancy ending.

Where an offer of tenancy is accepted, a Tenancy Agreement will be signed. As well as the date of entry, this includes details of tenant and landlord responsibilities. We will provide tenancy advice for new tenants and seek to answer queries at the point of tenancy sign up. Every new tenant will be provided with a Tenancy Handbook and a settling in visit will be carried out, normally within 8 weeks of the tenancy start date.

9. Performance Management

The Head of Housing Services has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Void Management Policy. The Housing Operations Managers are responsible for key aspects of allocating void tenancies and the Senior Maintenance Officers are responsible for key aspects of repairing void properties. Specific tasks within the void management process are delegated to appropriate staff.

We clearly define budgetary responsibility and delegation of authority for void management functions within our Financial Regulations and Standing Orders.

To monitor the effectiveness of this policy, Key Performance Indicators (Appendix 2) will be used to measure void management outcomes. We routinely review and analyse the outcomes and make recommendations where changes are required.

Management Committee and appropriate sub-committees receive regular updates on the implementation of the Void Management Policy so that they can be reasonably assured that it is operating effectively in practice.

In addition, in accordance with the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) for the Scottish Housing Regulator, the overall annual void loss figure is also reported as part of the ARC Return.

The Association's performance on void management is made available to our residents via our newsletters, annual reports and annual summary report on our Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

10. Customer Involvement

We will promote our Void Management Policy through our newsletter, website and tenancy handbook. Where we plan to make significant changes to the policy, we will consult tenants through short-life working groups, consultation events or our Tenant Panel in line with our Tenant Participation and Engagement Strategy.

You can find out more information about our tenant engagement work on our website and Tenant Participation Strategy.

11. Legislative Framework & Policy Context

We are regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). Their Regulatory Framework sets out seven Standards of Governance and Financial Management.

Relevant to this Policy are elements under Standards:

- **Standard 1:** The governing body leads and directs the RSL to achieve good outcomes for its tenants and other service users.
- **Standard 2:** The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.
- **Standard 3:** The RSL manages its resources to ensure its financial well-being, while maintaining rents at a level that tenants can afford to pay.
- **Standard 4:** The governing body bases its decisions on good quality information and advice and identifies and mitigates risks to the organisation's purpose.

Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Charter sets out the standards and outcomes for all social landlords when performing their wide range of activities. The Association will comply with the following Scottish Social Housing Charter requirements most relevant to this policy:

- **Outcome 1:** Equalities - every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.
- **Outcome 4:** Quality of Housing – 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 (EESH) by December 2020
- **Outcome 5:** Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements – Tenants' homes are

well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

- **Outcome 13:** Value for Money - tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

12. Key Association Policies

Complaints

Although we are committed to providing high levels of service, we accept that there may be occasions where a service user may not be satisfied with the service received from the Association. Any person looking to make a complaint can find out more about how to do so by following this link [Complaint Handling Procedure](#).

Ethical Conduct

The Association is committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in all its activities both our [Management Committee](#) and [staff](#) must adhere to our Code of Conduct, which can be found by following the links above.

Data Protection

We will comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018, which gives individuals the right to see and receive a copy of any personal information that is held about them by the Association and to have any inaccuracies corrected. You can find out more about how we manage personal data [here](#).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

NGHA aims to promote equality and diversity and operate equal opportunities policies which inform all aspects of its business. To find out more please see the following link [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#).

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed for this policy and can be provided upon request.

Appendix 1 – New Gorbals Lettable Standard

New Gorbals Lettable Standard

New Gorbals Housing Association are committed to providing our Tenants with excellent quality housing, which is safe, secure and meet the expectations of our Tenants. To help us achieve this, we have produced this Lettable Standard which will ensure that all properties let by New Gorbals Housing Association meet these high standards.

Aims

To ensure that properties are offered for let in a condition:

- which exceeds the tolerable standards.
- which is free from damp or mould.
- which is wind proof and watertight.
- which meets the SHQS standard.
- which meets EESSH Standard.

Objectives

To provide a house which meets the expectations of the incoming tenant the Association will ensure all empty properties reach the following standards.

Lettable Standard

Common Areas - The common area, accessible to the tenants, will be inspected to ensure it is free from major defects. The close, backcourt, stair lighting and controlled entry will be maintained on a regular basis. This also includes graffiti removal, reporting bulk items and repairing damage to the common elements.

Doors - Flat entrance door to be well fitting, secure and free from any major defects, all locks will be changed, and two sets of keys will be provided to each new tenant. Two fobs or keys will also be provided for the secured close entrance door. Back door and Cellar door keys will be provided where appropriate. Pass doors to be well fitting, free from major defects. All doors handles and latches will be checked to ensure they are working freely and operating properly.

Flooring - All floors will be secure and free of any major gaps which may cause damage to any floor covering. All protruding nails will be removed. All floors will be brushed, cleaned and mopped where required

Floor Coverings - Where carpets, laminate and other floor coverings are left in the property, it will be at the discretion of the Housing and Maintenance Officer as to whether they should be removed Any floor coverings that remain will be the

responsibility of the incoming tenant. Anti slip floor coverings, where provided should be in good condition and free from any major defect. Carpet grips will be left if they are in good condition.

Skirtings and Facings - Skirting's and facings will be complete and similar in appearance. Any new skirting or facing will be painted to suit surrounding.

Kitchen Units - Kitchen units/ worktops will be operational and free of any major defects e.g. obvious unsightly appearance or damage. All units will be of matching appearance. Work surfaces to be hygienic, clean and presentable. All kitchens will meet SQHS where possible

Kitchen Sink - The kitchen sink to be clean, complete with plugs and chains, free of any major defects e.g. obvious unsightly appearance or damage and taps operational.

Windows - All windows will be checked to make sure they open and close easily, and restrictors to be fitted and working properly.

Sanitaryware - Sanitaryware will be clean, complete with plugs and chains, free of any major defects e.g. obvious unsightly appearance or damage and taps will be operational. A thermostatic shower will be fitted where no previous facility is available.

Pipework - Pipework to be free of any leaks or blockages and provision made for connection to automatic washing machine supply and waste.

Plasterwork - Walls and ceilings will be free of any major defects.

Tiling/ Wet Wall Panels - All missing and defective wall tiles will be replaced, grouted and sealed (where possible). Where the layout of the bathroom has been changed new splashback's will be installed at both bath and wash hand basin this may be installed as wet wall panels. Where a shower is installed tiling/ wet wall panels should be full height on walls adjacent to the shower with either a shower rail and curtain or shower screen fitted.

Glazing - Glazing to be cleaned inside and out, presentable and appropriate for the room it is fitted in. All glazing to be free from defect e.g. cracks or condensation between panes

Electrical Installation

- An electrical safety check will be carried out by a qualified electrician and all remedial works highlighted will be rectified before re-letting.
- Electrical safety certificate will also be provided Energy efficient light bulbs should be in place in all areas
- Adequate switches and sockets will be fitted to each room following the electrical check.
- Paint to be removed from all switches and sockets

- Interconnected smoke alarms will be fitted to the lounge and hallway and a CO detector will be fitted where required. A heat detector will be fitted in the kitchen with a central control unit in the hallway for testing where appropriate/ required.
- All Extractor fans will be serviced and left fully operational.
- The Association will provide one outlet in the living room that will access all digital channels and sky or cable TV

Gas/Heating System - A full gas service will be carried out by a Gas Safe engineer and relevant paperwork will be provided. All remedial works found at the gas service will be rectified before re-letting. All bayonet fittings for cooker supplies will be removed and pipe work capped.

Cleanliness - The property is to be left in a good and clean condition. All rooms, including cupboards to be in accordance with the following criteria.

Windows - Wash inside and outside surfaces of glazed windows, including sashes, sills and frames.

Floors - All timber floors to be brushed and debris removed. Timber floors to be scrubbed with soap/disinfectant and water and mopped dry where applicable. Vinyl floors should be washed with cloth or sponge and mopped dry.

Ceilings and Walls - Should be dusted down and any cobwebs etc. and removed. Any grease or mould marks should also be cleaned especially in the kitchen area

Paintwork - Windows and frames should be free of mould and condensation and the surfaces clean. All skirtings and facings should be dusted down and washed.

Sanitaryware - Sanitary ware shall be cleaned and shall include bath panel(s), WHB and pedestal, WC bowl and cistern. Ceramic tiled surfaces in bathroom shall also be cleaned.

Kitchen Units - Kitchen fittings, units (including tops of wall units), worktops and sink tops shall have ALL external, surfaces cleaned. Insides of drawers and unit cupboards shall be cleaned. Ceramic tiled surfaces and splash backs in kitchen should also be cleaned

Switches/ Sockets - Switches, sockets, door handles, fingerplates etc. shall also be cleaned

Doors - All marks on doors to be cleaned including door handles.

New build properties - Snagging work will be completed in advance of the new tenant moving into a new build property. However, where minor snagging work is incomplete, the new tenant will be notified and arrangements made for access so that the contractor can complete works as part of their defects liability.

Decoration

The interior decoration of the dwelling is to be left in a good state of repair. Including:

Ceilings

- ensure the ceilings are not heavily nicotine stained
- ensure the emulsion paint is not flaking, especially kitchens and bathrooms
- ensure any textured finish has not been badly applied.

Walls

- ensure if wallpapered it is done neatly and completed
- ensure if emulsion it is complete and uniformly covering the walls
- ensure there are no excessive holes from shelves, picture hooks etc
- ensure the surfaces are not heavily nicotine stained, check especially tops of walls.

Paintwork

- ensure all the surfaces are uniformly glossed
- the surfaces are not excessively chipped, especially door frames, skirting and inside of front and back doors
- ensure door handles etc., are free of paint.

Sanitaryware

- ensure the tiles/ wet wall, sanitary ware, and splash backs are free of paint.

Decoration Allowance - Decoration vouchers will be given to the incoming tenants should the house fail to meet the Association's decoration standards.

Redecoration - In extreme cases, where a flat may be refused because of the condition of the decoration and especially if it is a retirement property, consideration may be given to redecorating part or all of the property.

New Gorbals Housing Association

Void Management Policy – Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicator	Target
Average Time Taken To Relet Properties.	≤ 20 calendar days
Percentage Of Rent Loss Through Properties Being Empty.	≤ 0.4%
Percentage Of Lettable Homes That Became Vacant.	≤ 7%
Percentage Of Tenancy Offers Refused.	≤ 25%