

MOLENDINAR PARK HOUSING ASSOCIATION

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

Date of Review: 18th August 2015
Date of Next Review: August 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This document outlines Molendinar Park Housing Association's policy in relation to the management of empty houses.

1.2 The Association will seek to minimise the time that a property is left empty, recognising that an empty house is:

- 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 nuisance to neighbours
- The danger of physical deterioration resulting in increased costs
- A negative image in the area – in particular, for immediate neighbours.

1.3 The only exception to this general aim of minimising voids would be in cases where the Association required empty properties for possible use as decant homes.

1.4 The Association has identified the following general aims and objectives in relation to the management of voids:

- To minimise the loss of rental income by re-allocating properties available to let as economically and efficiently as possible
- To maximize the opportunities to meet housing need in line with the Association's Allocation Policy by allocating houses for let as efficiently as possible.
- To ensure the accommodation offered complies with all Health and Safety requirements.
- To continually improve the service through obtaining and recording staff and tenants views.

1.5 The document covers the following areas:

- The circumstances in which properties become empty
- The reletting of empty houses
- Repairs
- Empty properties

1.6 This policy has been written using current good practice guidance, in particular;

- **Scottish Secure Tenancy – The Association can exercise direct control over its tenants via the terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement. The purpose of this is to protect the interest of its tenants, the wider community and the Association.**

- **Housing (Scotland) Act 2001- The Void Management Policy adheres to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, in particular guidance in relation to the termination of a tenancy (notified or abandoned), compensation for improvements and access rights for inspections.**
- **Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 – the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter through the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 requires the Association to report to the Scottish Housing Regulator annually on the achievement of the Charter Outcomes. This includes performance in the management of empty homes.**
- **Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1998 – The Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have benefited from an inspection of gas appliances.**
- **The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008- The Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have a valid energy Performance Certificate.**

The Void management Policy complies with guidelines set by the Scottish Government in the Social Housing Charter. In terms of the management of voids, Outcome 4 of the Charter states that every social landlord must manage their business so that : Tenants homes, as a minimum meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.

2. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Molendinar Park Housing Association has identified the following general requirements in relation to the management of empty properties.

- Comply with relevant legislation.
- Comply with the relevant Scottish Housing Regulator performance standards
- Provide completed statistical returns required by the Scottish Housing Regulator
- Minimise the number of empty properties and the time that properties are empty for
- Have clear procedures for dealing with void properties
- Monitor the management of void properties

3. REASONS PROPERTIES ARE VOID

- 3.1 Although Molendinar Park does not expect a high void rate, it will seek to identify the reasons why houses become and remain void.
- 3.2 The Association will categorise empty properties according to their reasons for being void.

- Being inspected
- Being repaired
- Available for let
- Held for decanting
- Held for major repair work
- Held for sale with vacant possession

3.3 Where a high proportion of houses in a particular area become void, the Association will investigate the reasons for this and will consider specific initiatives to remedy the problem.

4. ENDING TENANCIES

4.1 Molendinar Park Housing Association will ensure that procedures relating to empty properties are put in motion as soon as a notice to terminate a tenancy is received.

4.2 The Association will require all tenants to provide four weeks written notice of their intention to leave a property and to complete an end of tenancy form which seeks information on the following:

- Date of tenancy termination
- Reasons for leaving
- date of proposed housing inspection
- Tenure (landlord details if appropriate) of new property.
- Forwarding address
- If tenant deceased next of kin details
- Signature by the tenant and joint tenant, as well as any partner or spouse to acknowledge that they are agreeable to the termination of the tenancy in accordance with the Matrimonial Homes (Scotland) Act 1981.

4.3 The Association will acknowledge receipt of end of tenancy notices.

4.4 Tenants will be expected to hand their keys in to the Association office **by 12 noon** on the date of their leaving the property. Where the termination date falls on a Saturday or Sunday or any other date that the office is closed, the tenant will be advised that the keys must be returned by 10am on the first working date after the termination date.

4.5 Where the outgoing tenant agrees, the Association will arrange for an applicant to view the property before the end of tenancy date.

4.6 As soon as a tenant has notified the Association that they wish to give up their tenancy the Association will arrange for an inspection of the property. Agreement

will be reached with the tenant concerning the condition in which the property is to be left, rechargeable repairs, rubbish clearance.

- 4.7 In cases where the property has become vacant due to the death of a tenant, the tenancy will terminate on the date of death. In the event that the deceased tenant's family/representatives require a period beyond a timescale which is deemed to be reasonable to remove furniture and personal belongings, then they will be required to pay the rent charge for this period, for example in excess of 7 calendar days.
- 4.8 If the tenant vacates the property and returns their keys before the end of the 28 day notice period, they will still be charged rent for the full 28 days. In the event that a property is re-let within the 28 day termination period, the rent account of the outgoing tenant will be adjusted accordingly.
- 4.9 Damage caused by the tenant but not repaired prior to the tenant moving out of the property, will be repaired by the Association to maintain the standards of the property. Any costs incurred will be recharged to the former tenant and all appropriate steps will be taken to recover the monies.
- 4.10** Information concerning the procedures for ending tenancies is provided to all Tenants in their Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement and Section 18 of the tenant's handbook.
- 4.11 Section 5.24 of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement states that the Association may be entitled to pay the outgoing tenant compensation for any alterations/improvements they have made to the property during their tenancy. Each application received will be considered on its merit.

5. ABANDONED PROPERTIES

- 5.1 Molendinar Park Housing Association will develop clear procedures for dealing with properties that are believed to be abandoned. These procedures will cover:
- The checking of apparently unoccupied property
 - Means for attempting to discover a tenant's whereabouts
 - Serving official abandonment notices
 - Storing and disposing of items left in abandoned houses
 - Dealing with services such as gas/electricity

6. REPAIRS TO EMPTY HOUSES

- 6.1 The Association will arrange for a property that is due to be vacated to be Inspected by the Maintenance Officer/ Housing Services Officer before the outgoing tenant leaves.

- 6.2 At the end of the inspection the Tenant/s will be informed in writing of any outstanding repair work for which they have responsibility to carry out before vacating the property.
- 6.3 Repairs that are the responsibility of the Association will be ordered within one working day of the void inspection being carried out and this will be co-ordinated by the Assistant Maintenance Officer/Maintenance Clerical Officer.
- 6.4 Molendinar Park Housing Association does not anticipate that vandalism to empty houses will be a significant problem but, should this be the case, the Association will:
- Seek to reduce vandalism by securing empty property
 - Report all cases of vandalism to the police
- 6.5 The timescale to complete a void property will be five working days. In the event of the requirement of an extension of these timescales due to major repairs or unusual works being required the Maintenance Officer/Assistant Maintenance Officer will liaise closely with the relevant Housing Services Officer/Housing Services Manager/Director.

7. RELETTING EMPTY HOUSES

- 7.1 Molendinar Housing Association will ensure that empty properties are re-let as promptly and efficiently as possible and that the Association makes the best use of its housing stock.
- 7.2 The Association will seek to minimise the number of offers made before a property is let by:
- Conducting an annual review of the waiting list
 - Collecting accurate records on the needs/wants of applicants
 - Closely matching applicant and housing needs
 - Giving applicants accurate information about the property
 - Making appropriate offers
 - Checking the condition of the property before it is viewed
- 7.3 All applicant households will be accompanied when viewing an empty property.
- 7.4 Refusal rates and reasons for refusal information will be collected and monitored.
- 7.5 The Association will consider adopting specific strategies for any particularly “difficult to let” housing.

8. COMMITTEE AND STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

- 8.1 Molendinar Park Housing Association will ensure that staff and committee responsibilities in relation to void management are clear.
- 8.2 The Management Committee has responsibility for agreeing policy and evaluating performance.
- 8.3 The Housing Services Officer responsible for each area will have overall responsibility for co-ordinating and monitoring void management activities.
- 8.4 The Association will ensure that staff has the appropriate skills and knowledge necessary to perform their jobs effectively by employing people with relevant qualifications or experience and through providing suitable training opportunities.
- 8.5 The Housing Services Manager/ Maintenance Officer will discuss the void management service at the weekly Housing Services Meeting.

9. STANDARDS TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 9.1 The Association will monitor the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of its empty property management and its performance will be reported quarterly to the relevant Local management Committee.
- 9.2 Where practicable, the Association will seek to establish performance standards for contractors, for example, response times, the standard of repair work etc.
- 9.3 The Association will collect monitoring information on void management and will also aim to set performance standards for dealing with empty property. Monitoring information and performance standards are likely to include:
 - The percentage of stock that is void (by area, property type, size)
 - Reasons for the property being vacant
 - The length of time a property is empty for
 - Annual rent loss as a result of voids (by area)
 - Time taken to re-let
 - The number of times a property is refused.
- 9.4 The Association will regularly benchmark its void management performance with peer Association's. The main source of information used for benchmarking will be the Annual return on the Charter.

9.4 The Association will publish its performance in Void Management against key performance indicators through its Annual Charter report.

Core indicators:

- average time to relet
- void loss as % of annual rental Income

Any loss of rental income due to voids is reported quarterly to the Management Committee.

11. POLICY REVIEW

Molendinar Housing Association will review its Void Management Policy at least every five years.

This review will take account of:

- Legislative change
- Changes to Scottish Housing Regulator requirements
- Good practice advice
- The actual performance of the Association and contractors
- The views of tenants

Tenants will be informed about significant policy/practice changes.