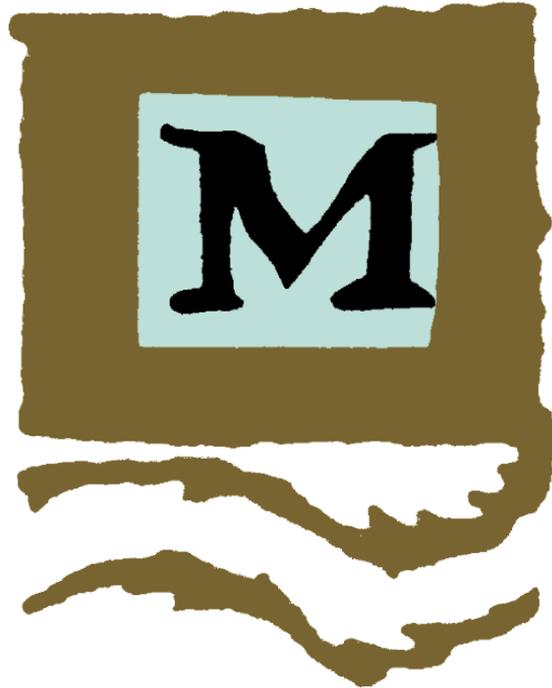


MOLENDINAR PARK HOUSING ASSOCIATION



VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

Adopted: 7 May 2019
Date of Review: May 2022

Molendinar Park Housing Association
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*Registered in Scotland 2400 R (S)
Registered Scottish Charity SC043725
Registered Property Factor PF 000125*

POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

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

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 The Association seeks to minimise the time that a property is left empty, recognising that an empty property 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 to the Association and nuisance to neighbours
 - The danger of physical deterioration resulting in increased costs
 - A negative image in the area – in particular, for immediate neighbours.
- 2.2 The only exception to this general aim of minimising voids is cases where the Association requires empty properties for possible use as decant homes.
- 2.3 The Association has identified the following general objectives in relation to the management of voids:
- To minimise the loss of rental income by re-allocating properties available to let as quickly, economically and efficiently as possible
 - To maximize the opportunities to meet housing need in line with the Association's Allocation Policy by allocating properties 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 on the process of reletting homes, with the aim of identifying key improvements.

2.4 This policy covers the following areas:

- The circumstances in which properties become empty
- The re-letting of empty properties
- Repairs
- Empty properties

3. LEGISLATION, GOOD PRACTICE AND THE SCOTTISH HOUSING CHARTER

3.1 This policy draws on

- **Housing (Scotland) Act 2001- The Policy adheres to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, 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.**
- **Matrimonial Homes (Scotland Act) 1981**
- **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 and fittings.**
- **The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008- The Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have a valid energy Performance Certificate.**

3.2 This Policy complies with the Scottish, Social Housing Charter Outcome 4 which states that every social landlord must manage their businesses so that: 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 (EESH) by December 2020.

Outcome 1 in relation to Equalities is also relevant – Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- every tenant and other customer have their individual needs recognised
- is treated fairly and with respect
- receives fair access to housing and housing services

4. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

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

- Comply with relevant legislation.
- Deliver effective Charter outcomes
- Provide completed Annual Return on the Charter 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

5. REASONS PROPERTIES ARE VOID

5.1 Although Molendinar Park does not expect a high void rate, we will seek to identify why houses become and remain void.

5.2 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/modernisation
- Held for sale with vacant possession

5.3 Where a high proportion of houses in an area or of a particular type, become void, the Association will investigate the reasons for this and will consider specific initiatives to remedy the problem. Where there is an outgoing tenant, the tenant will be asked why they are giving up the tenancy to assist in identifying the reasons for properties becoming empty.

6. ENDING TENANCIES

6.1 We will ensure that procedures relating to empty properties are actioned as soon as a notice to terminate a tenancy is received.

- 6.2 We 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.
- 6.3 We will acknowledge receipt of end of tenancy notices.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 Where the outgoing tenant agrees, the Association will arrange for an applicant to view the property before the end of tenancy date.
- 6.6 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 etc.
- 6.7 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 equivalent of the rent charge and any service charge for this period, for example in excess of 7 calendar days.
- 6.8 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. If a property is re-let within the 28-day termination period, the rent account of the outgoing tenant will be adjusted accordingly.

- 6.9 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 costs.
- 6.10 Information concerning the procedures for ending tenancies is provided to all Tenants in their Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement and in their tenant's handbook.
- 6.11 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 and in line with established procedures and legislation.

7. ABANDONED PROPERTIES

- 7.1 We have an Abandonment Policy and clear procedures for dealing with properties that are believed to be abandoned. These procedures 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
 - Recording of action taken by the Association including a register of abandoned properties.

8. REPAIRS TO EMPTY PROPERTIES

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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. Where this is not feasible, the Association will arrange for the work to be carried out and the out-going tenant recharged for such work.
- 8.3 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.

- 8.4 We do not anticipate that vandalism to empty houses will be a significant problem but, should this be the case, we will:
- Seek to reduce vandalism by securing empty property, or take steps to give the appearance of the property still being tenanted – e.g. hanging of removeable curtains etc.
 - Report all cases of vandalism to the police
- 8.5 The timescale to complete a void property, ready for re-let 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/Director.

9. RE-LETTING EMPTY HOUSES

- 9.1 We 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.
- 9.2 We 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 housing 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
- 9.3 All applicants will be accompanied by a staff member, when viewing an empty property.
- 9.4 Refusal rates and reasons for refusal information will be collected and monitored to inform practice.
- 9.5 The Association will consider adopting specific strategies for any particularly “difficult to let” housing; these may include Local Lettings Initiatives, with the prior approval of the Committee of Management, redecoration initiatives, etc.

10. COMMITTEE AND STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

- 10.1 We will ensure that staff and Committee responsibilities in relation to void management are clear.
- 10.2 The Management Committee has responsibility for agreeing policy and evaluating performance.
- 10.3 The Housing Services Officer responsible for each area has overall responsibility for co-ordinating and monitoring void management activities.
- 10.4 We will ensure that staff have 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.
- 10.5 There will be weekly discussions between housing and maintenance staff about the management of empty homes and about the times and targets for re-letting properties.

11. STANDARDS TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 11.1 We will monitor our re-let times and the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of our empty property management with performance being reported quarterly to the Committee of Management.
- 11.2 We will seek to establish performance standards for contractors, for example, response times, the standard of repair work etc.
- 11.3 We will collect monitoring information on void management and will also aim to set performance standards for dealing with empty property. Monitoring information which is reported quarterly to the Management Committee will 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
 - Annual rent loss as a result of voids (by area)
 - Time taken to re-let
 - The number of times a property is refused.

- 11.4 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.
- 11.5 The Association will publish its performance in Void Management against key performance indicators through its Annual Charter report.

Core indicators:

- average time in days to re-let
- void loss as % of annual rental Income

12. POLICY REVIEW

- 12.1 We will review the Void Management Policy every three years or earlier if required by
- Legislative change
 - Changes to Scottish Housing Regulator requirements
 - Good practice advice
 - The actual performance of the Association and contractors and
 - The views of tenants

Tenants will be consulted on proposed policy/practice changes.