

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

INTRODUCTION

A void is a property for which there is a current rent account, but no current tenancy exists. While a property is void rent is lost during the void period.

Ayrshire Housing adopts the definition of a void property as “a dwelling which is on the rent account, but for which there is no current tenancy”.

Ayrshire Housing recognises that there are different ways in which a property can become void and defines them as follows:

- **Formal Termination:** The tenant is required to give 28 days' written notice in terms of their tenancy agreement of their intention to leave the property.
- **Death of Tenant:** Where Ayrshire Housing are notified of the death of a tenant and there is no successor.
- **Abandonment:** Where Ayrshire Housing issues a legal notice to a tenant who has vacated the property without notice.
- **Eviction:** Where Ayrshire Housing completes court action to evict a tenant.
- **Transfers:** Where the tenant is re-housed by Ayrshire Housing
- **Development Voids:** Where a new property is handed over to Ayrshire Housing as complete and is untenanted.
- **Decants:** Where a tenant must be moved, usually temporarily, from their property for the purposes of refurbishment or because of the property becoming uninhabitable, e.g., fire, flood.

Ayrshire Housing is committed to ensuring that the turnover of housing stock is effectively managed to maximise rental income, meet housing need, and contribute to positive estate management. Void management procedures will be implemented to address the main aims and objectives of this policy.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The key aims and objectives of the Void Management Policy are:

- To meet all legislative, contractual, and regulatory obligations.
- To minimise time taken to complete repairs to void properties.
- To minimise void rent loss and maximise rental income.
- To ensure timeous allocation of vacant properties thus reducing the length of time a property is at void status.
- To ensure that void repair costs are controlled and monitored.

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- To ensure that properties are repaired to a defined lettable standard (Appendix 1) prior to allocation.
- To control turnover of properties and increase sustainability of tenancies.
- To ensure that tenants are aware of their obligations and that end of tenancy arrears and rechargeable repairs are prevented where possible.
- To ensure that new tenants are satisfied with the standard and quality of their home.

The association will seek to minimise the time that a property is void, recognising that an empty property represents:

- Lost rental income to the association.
- An opportunity to alleviate an applicant's housing need.
- A negative image for the area – particularly for immediate neighbours.
- A target for vandalism resulting in increased costs and safety concerns from the neighbours.
- The danger for deterioration in its condition thus resulting in increased repair costs.

Ayrshire Housing will involve tenants in void management by:

- Giving tenants information about the void procedure in the Tenants Handbook.
- Ensuring that tenants are fully aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to giving notice of ending their tenancy and the condition in which the property must be left.
- Encouraging tenants to report abandoned properties by placing articles in both the handbook and newsletters.
- Raising tenants' awareness about the costs incurred because of leaving properties in poor condition and encouraging tenants to remove all items from the property and leave it in a clean and tidy condition.
- Ensuring all New Tenants receive a New Tenant Satisfaction Questionnaire to identify gaps in either the void management or the allocation process.

LEGAL BACKGROUND AND COMPLIANCE

The management of voids is undertaken to ensure the association lets its housing stock in a condition which meets the legal obligations under the relevant legislation such as the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 which incorporates relevant repairing and tenancy related obligations. In addition, Health & Safety legislation is recognised for electrical and gas safety checks which are legally required.

This policy takes account of current good practice and to the Scottish Government Social Housing Charter outcomes 4, 11 and 13 which state that:

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Outcome 4 –Quality of Housing

Social landlords manage their businesses so that “tenants homes, as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), and any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat Standard”.

Outcome 11: Tenancy Sustainment

Social landlords ensure that: “tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.”

Outcome 13 – Value for Money

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that “tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay”.

The terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement and the Short Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement that are specific to the implementation of the Void Policy are found in Section 6 entitled “Ending the Tenancy”. Ayrshire Housing’s staff will ensure that these terms are explained to tenants during the sign-up process. Where a tenant expresses their wish to move on or transfer, they will be given clear guidelines on their termination responsibilities.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS

The association will establish a range of key performance indicators and targets through the Business Plan which is reviewed annually. These will include, but will not necessarily be restricted to, measurements covering the following:

- Void rent loss (as a % of annual rent due).
- Cumulative void rent loss.
- Number of voids let monthly.
- Actual and average void turnaround times.
- Voids as a % of total stock.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

These indicators will be continuously monitored internally by the association’s management, corporately by Ayrshire Housing’s Board and externally through benchmarking and by returns to the Scottish Housing Regulator through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). The information will also be used to highlight areas of concern and, if appropriate, to inform discussions with contractors who may contribute to the overall performance.

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INSPECTION AND REPAIRS

Where notice is received of a termination of tenancy an initial inspection of the property shall be carried out prior to the tenant vacating the property.

The purpose of this inspection is to ascertain the general condition of the property and to advise the tenant of what is required to end the tenancy satisfactorily. This will cover obligations such as the rent account and any work required to be done by the tenant prior to ending the tenancy. The tenant will be advised that the association may recharge for any work required due to damage or neglect by the tenant.

When the property is vacated it will be inspected and all statutory repairs will be instructed in addition to those required to ensure that the property is at the lettable standard (Appendix 1). The association will ensure that all repairs are carried out quickly to agreed timescales.

Occasionally, the association will take the opportunity to carry out major repairs and/or major component replacements and planned maintenance works while a property is void.

Alterations in void properties and/or non-standard fixtures carried out by or left by previous tenants, as agreed with the association, will be left for the incoming tenant only where they are to an acceptable standard, fit for purpose and pass any gas or electrical safety inspection. Items left without the agreement of the association will incur re-charges to outgoing tenants for the removal and or making good. If the association does not intend to maintain such alterations or fixtures the new tenant must be advised of this and sign an acceptance that they would be responsible for maintaining such items. The association will carry out its obligations to the previous tenant under the Right to Compensation for Improvements Policy where appropriate.

Depending on the decorative condition of the property the association may consider providing the new tenant with vouchers to assist with the costs of decorating. In exceptional circumstances the association may carry out decoration works to the property while it is void, particularly where the condition of the property is exceptionally poor and where failure to carry out such works might have a significant impact on the let ability of the property.

DEATH OF THE TENANT

Where the termination of tenancy is due to the death of the tenant (and there is no one entitled to succeed to the tenancy) the termination date will be the date on which the tenant died. The tenant's representative will have 14 days to clear out the house during which time no rent will be charged. Where the tenant's representative takes longer than 14 days the association will make a charge for loss of rent for each day beyond the initial 14 days. Where there are items left in the property and these to be disposed recharges may be raised where appropriate.

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LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES

The key aims and objectives outlined are also dependent on several other relevant policies and procedures and cannot be achieved solely by the implementation of the void management policy and procedures. The following policies and procedures all impact to some extent on the association being able to effectively achieve the aims and objectives of the Void Management Policy:

- Repairs and Maintenance Policy (delivered through the Reactive Repairs Contract).
- Allocations Policy.
- Arrears Policy and Procedures.
- Estate Management Policy and Procedures.
- Abandoned Tenancies Policy and Procedures.
- Right to Compensation to Improvements Policy.
- Complaints Handling Policy.
- Aids and Adaptations Policy.

These all contribute to the association being able to maximise rental income, minimise void rent loss and efficiently re-let void properties to applicants in housing need.

APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

Appeals or complaints against our operation of this Policy will be processed through the association's complaints handling procedure, which is available at our office or on our website.

TRAINING

Prior to the implementation of this policy, training will be provided to all relevant staff. Ongoing training requirements will also be regularly reviewed.

EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ayrshire Housing is committed to equal and fair treatment of all sections of the community. Accordingly, no person will be discriminated against during the implementation of this Policy on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. In delivering this Policy, Ayrshire Housing's staff will comply fully with the requirements of the association's Equalities and Human Rights Policy. This policy has been subject to an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment, see below.

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Appendix 1

MINIMUM LETTABLE STANDARD

It is Ayrshire Housing's policy that the following minimum standards should be achieved for all void properties:

Works	Minimum Standard
General Cleanliness	The house will be cleared of furniture, carpets, and belongings/rubbish from the previous tenant. Floors should be swept out, kitchen and bathrooms' surfaces to be washed down. Any loft spaces, basements and outbuildings should be emptied. Outhouses or sheds in a poor state of repairs should be removed. Any external buildings that remain will be gifted to the tenant with no further liability for Ayrshire Housing.
Garden Areas	Gardens attached to the property should be cleared of rubbish and the grass cut if required. Broken or hazardous fencing should be removed. Paths and steps should be sound and free from trip hazards. All boundary fences should be intact or reinstated if missing. Dividing fences are tenants' responsibility however Ayrshire Housing will remove any parts that are damaged but will not renew.
Electrics	All electrics must be checked, and a certificate of inspection retained by the association. Alterations to the electric system clearly undertaken by the tenant must be removed unless a compliance certificate covers them. Certificates are available for viewing on My Home.
EPC	All void properties require a valid EPC. Where the existing EPC is over 10 years old, a new EPC will be commissioned. All EPCs should be situated within the property, usually located at the electrical consumer unit.
Microgeneration certificate	If applicable these will be provided to new tenants with details on how to register with Scottish Power.
PV panels	These will be serviced as part of the electrical checks and user information provided.
Fire suppression systems	If applicable, these will be checked and information regarding system operation provided.
Electric Heating	All types of electric heating will be checked as part of the electrical safety check with operating instructions provided.
Gas	All houses with gas central heating to have a full gas safety check undertaken and the compliance certificate will be available to view on My Home.
Gas/Electric Cooking	Where the previous tenant has left a gas or electric cooker, this should be removed and supply capped
Smoke Alarm	All smoke alarms will be tested. Where fitted, CO alarms will be tested.

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Works	Minimum Standard (cont'd)
Water Supply	During severe cold spells consideration should be given to whether stopcocks should be shut off and the water supply drained down. In this circumstance, the water supply will be fully flushed to ensure a wholesome supply.
Windows	All windows should be fully operational and checked for safety.
Front Door	Minimum mortice on timber door or security lock on glazed door. Check for security and draughts/water ingress. Locks are changed when property becomes void. Flat entrance doors leading to a shared communal area must be a minimum 30min fire door including door furniture.
Internal Pass Doors	All pass doors should be intact and operating properly. Bathroom doors should have a locking device. Door closers should be operating where fitted. Where internal pass doors are missing these will be reinstated. Where a door closer is present, this is for the safety of the tenants and should not be removed.
Floors	All loose and missing floorboards to be re-secured/replaced. Floor surface to be even to allow carpets or vinyl to be laid.
Skirtings and Facings	Missing or badly damaged skirting/facings to be replaced. If possible, to repair – should be re-secured and filled where necessary.
Bedroom Cupboards	Missing shelves or hanging rails to be replaced. Mirrored doors can be left if in good condition however, in the event of renewal our standard would be fitted.
Hall Cupboards	Missing shelves or hanging rails to be replaced and clear of any items.
Shower unit	Any electric showers should be included in the electrical check, if faulty they should be removed as the association will not maintain electric showers other than ones fitted by the association. Shower screens can be left if in good condition or replaced if defective. Replaced like for like.
Bathroom Suite	Bathroom suite should be checked for chips/cracks. Toilet seat should be replaced in all voids. Coloured bathroom suites will be replaced with white should replacement be required. Bathroom spec available on request.
Bathroom and Kitchen Extractor Fans	All void properties will, where practicable, have a humidistat fan fitted to the bathroom and kitchen. Where properties have mechanical input or extract ventilation installed, these will be serviced, and user information provided to the incoming tenant.
Kitchen Units	All kitchen units to be thoroughly checked and hinges replaced/adjusted where necessary. Damaged drawers and doors should be replaced unless damage is minor. Damaged worktops as a result of burning or water ingress should be replaced where possible.

Works	Minimum Standard (cont'd)
Decoration	<p>The association is generally not responsible for the condition/level of decoration in a property. However, where the condition of the decoration is deemed to be so bad as to affect the likelihood of anyone accepting the property, then a decoration allowance may be given. In extreme cases the association may consider carrying out decorative works. Where a property is heavily stained by tobacco all walls should be cleaned sealed and painted prior to relet. Where is property requires extensive redecoration tenants may be recharged.</p> <p>Where there are signs of mould or damp this should be fully investigated, and the appropriate measures taken.</p>

Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EqHRIA)

Title of Policy	Voids Management Policy
Relevance to the Business Plan	<p><i>Explain how the aims of the policy/decision impact on them.</i></p> <p>The Business Plan contains a number of relevant aims and objectives:</p> <p>We aim to deliver excellent service which our tenants appreciate.</p> <p>We aim to enhance our tenants' quality of life.</p> <p>We aim to ensure that our neighbourhoods remain desirable places.</p> <p>We will provide "Quality Homes" by "maintaining our houses to the highest standard".</p> <p>This policy will provide a means for the delivery of these aims and objectives by establishing efficient processes for the management of void properties and ensuring they meet our minimum lettable standard.</p>
Name of Lead Person	Jennifer McCann
Date EqHRIA completed	August 2023
Review date and frequency of reviews	At the next review of the policy.

Scoping

What is the purpose of the proposed policy (or changes to be made to the policy)?	<p>The key aims and objectives of the Void Management Policy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To meet all legislative, contractual, and regulatory obligations. • To minimise time taken to complete repairs to void properties. • To minimise void rent loss and maximise rental income. • To ensure timeous allocation of vacant properties thus reducing the length of time a
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	<p>property is at void status.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that void repair costs are controlled and monitored. • To ensure that properties are repaired to a defined lettable standard prior to allocation. • To control turnover of properties and increase sustainability of tenancies. • To ensure that tenants are aware of their obligations and that end of tenancy arrears and rechargeable repairs are prevented where possible. • To ensure that new tenants are satisfied with the standard and quality of their home.
Who is affected by the policy or who is intended to benefit from the proposed policy and how? (stakeholders)	Applicants on our waiting lists, transfer applicants (existing tenants who wish a transfer of accommodation, applicants on South Ayrshire Council's waiting lists who may be nominated to Ayrshire Housing for accommodation, Homeless persons who may be referred to Ayrshire Housing through Section 5 homeless persons protocols.
What human rights are engaged?	<p>The right to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.</p> <p>The right to a home which is accessible, affordable, and habitable.</p> <p>The right to not be subjected to discrimination.</p>
How will this policy impact on the equal enjoyment of human rights?	<p>No aspects of this policy are discriminatory.</p> <p>The policy will contribute to ensuring the accommodation is habitable by the requirement to meet our minimum lettable standard.</p>
In what way is the Equality Duty engaged?	
How will this policy affect compliance with equality duties?	There should be no negative effect on our compliance with our equality duties.

Evidence

Given the people potentially affected by this policy, have you gathered information on their diverse needs and/or experiences?

Do you have information on:	Yes	√	No		N/a	
Age	Yes	√	No		N/a	
Disability	Yes	√	No		N/a	
Sex (including pregnancy and maternity)	Yes		No		N/a	√
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender	Yes		No		N/a	√
Race	Yes	√	No		N/a	
Religion and Belief	Yes		No		N/a	√

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Staff	Yes		No		N/a	√
Tenants	Yes	√	No		N/a	
Those on the waiting list	Yes	√	No		N/a	
The local community	Yes		No		N/a	√

Is this information sufficient for the purposes of the assessment? Yes

If no, outline when and how it will be sourced to inform a further review. If the information is not relevant explain why there is unlikely to be an impact from the Policy on this group.

Impact

What does the information you have, tell you about how this policy might impact positively and/or negatively on your stakeholders and specific equalities groups?

The information we hold on applicants' ages and disabilities can have a positive impact by the policy providing a means for the provision of good quality housing suitable to applicants' needs.

Please summarise the results of the EqHRIA.

There should be no negative impacts because of the approval and application of this policy.
Some equalities and human rights aspects may be positively impacted by the policy providing the means for the delivery of good quality accommodation suitable for a range of applicants' needs.

7. What is your recommended course of action?

Outcome 1: Proceed – no potential for unlawful discrimination, and no adverse impact or breach of human rights articles have been identified.	√
Outcome 2: Proceed with adjustments to: address discrimination, remove barriers to the advancement of equality of opportunity and fostering good relations, address breaches of human rights.	
Outcome 3: Continue despite having identified some potential for adverse impact or missed opportunity to advance equality and human rights (justification to be clearly set out).	
Outcome 4: Stop and rethink as actual or potential unlawful discrimination or breach of human rights articles has been identified.	

8. Please explain how you will monitor and evaluate this policy to measure progress:

The outcomes of this policy will be monitored at an operational level by Senior Housing Officers, Technical Services Manager, Head of Housing and Communities, Head of Property and Development and the Director through the quarterly Performance Reporting framework.

The Board will also monitor the outcomes of the policy through the quarterly performance reporting framework (Performance Digest) and the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC)

9. Who will you share this EqHRIA with?

The wider public.

10. How will you share this EqHRIA?

By appending this impact assessment to the policy which is available on our website.

AUTHORISATION TO RECOMMEND IMPLEMENT THE POLICY

Authorisation date	4 September 2023
Authorisation Manager	