



Void Management Policy

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Ardenglen Housing Association can provide this procedure on request, in large print, in Braille, on tape or in other non-written format, and in a variety of languages.

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Ardenglen is a community based housing association operating in Castlemilk, which is in the south East of Glasgow. At the time of writing we own approximately 950 properties. Of these, 541 are rehabilitated tenemental stock, while the remaining are new build houses, cottage flats and tenements.
- 1.2 Like all landlords, the Association has a turnover in its housing stock as tenancies come to an end and new ones are created. It is inevitable that from time to time this will result in some properties being empty or 'void' for a period of time.
- 1.3 The way in which void properties are managed has significant consequences for the Association in terms of financial resources, as well as the service to outgoing and incoming tenants and the overall management of the estate.
- 1.4 This policy will set out Ardenglen's approach to managing tenancy ends and properties that become void as a result.

SECTION 2

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 To adhere to statutory and contractual obligations in relation to processing tenancy terminations, maintaining void properties, monitoring demand and letting properties.
- 2.2 To adhere to good practice and to the Scottish Government Social Housing Charter outcomes 4 and 13 which state that: -

Outcome 4 –Quality of housing “Tenants homes as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair”

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”

- 2.3 To minimise financial losses resulting from properties being void.
- 2.4 To ensure that tenants are fully aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to giving notice of tenancy ends and the condition in which the property must be left.

- 2.5 To keep void properties in a safe and well kept condition for the protection of tenants, the property and general appearance of the area.
- 2.6 To bring void properties to a lettable standard as quickly as possible.
- 2.7 To have systems in place for the prompt reletting of void properties.
- 2.8 To identify factors leading to high void turnover and difficult to let stock and develop appropriate strategies to address these issues.
- 2.9 To monitor our performance continually and to consult with tenants regarding performance and policy and to amend our policy and practice in the light of this.

SECTION 3

TENANCY END BY FORMAL NOTIFICATION

- 3.1 The Association reinforces at every opportunity the importance of the tenant giving 28 days notice that the tenancy is going to end. This begins at the tenancy sign up, and information is also contained within the Tenant Handbook and periodically in newsletters
- 3.2 The 28 day notice of termination of tenancy must be made in writing to the Association and signed by any tenants, joint tenants and spouses where appropriate
- 3.3 Where less than 28 days written notice is provided, the Association will take the termination date as being 28 days from when notice is received, unless the property can be reallocated before this time, thus minimising rent arrears.
- 3.4 Information will be provided confirming the correct procedure that should be followed to meet the contractual obligations of the tenancy agreement.
- 3.5 Housing staff will arrange to visit the property during the notice period to assess the repair and decoration standard and discuss any other matters relating to the tenancy such as the rent account or qualification to the Right to Repair Compensation Scheme. Details of this discussion will be sent to the outgoing tenant
- 3.6 Outgoing tenants will always be encouraged to provide ongoing contact details in the event that the Association requires getting in touch after keys are handed in
- 3.7 The process to reallocate a property begins as soon as termination notification is received. In certain circumstances, with agreement of the outgoing tenant, repairs may be completed or accompanied viewings with prospective tenants may take place during the notice period

SECTION 4

TENANCY END BY ABANDONMENT

- 4.1 From time to time, tenants leave their home with no intention of returning and fail to advise the Association. This is known as abandoning a property. The Association has a separate procedure on abandonment to provide guidance to staff on how to deal with such situations.
- 4.2 Where the Association has reason to believe that a property has been abandoned, relevant checks will be made to confirm the position. The nature of these checks will be dependent on the individual circumstances of the case but may include investigations with neighbours, family, hospital, social work department or prison
- 4.3 Where investigations conclude that a property has been abandoned, a legal notice will be hand delivered to the address of the property advising the tenant that that the house is considered to be unoccupied and that if the tenant has intentions of occupying it as their home, they must advise the Association in writing within 28 days from the date of the notice.
- 4.4 The notice also advises that if there are personal belongings within the property, they must be removed within 28 days from the date of the notice or they will be disposed of unless the value exceeds the costs of storing for 6 months plus any rent arrears if applicable.
- 4.5 Where necessary, the dwelling may be subject to various safety precautions in order to protect the Association's property
- 4.6 If the tenant has not contacted the Association at the end of the 28 day period, a second notice will be served on the 29th day, thus terminating the tenancy and resulting in the locks being changed
- 4.7 If belongings are found in the property, the Association is bound in terms of the legislation to act in the following way;
 - Take an inventory and photographs of the goods
 - Store the goods if, in the Association's opinion, the value of the goods is equivalent to storage costs plus any rent arrears. Otherwise, they may be disposed of
 - If after 6 months in storage the goods are not collected, the Association may sell them and use the proceeds to cover the storage costs or other sums due such as rent arrears
 - If at any time, the tenant wishes to take possession of the goods, the storage costs must be paid in advance
- 4.8 The Association will maintain a register of all abandoned properties. Properties will remain on the register for 5 years and will be available for public inspection on request

- 4.9 Tenants have the right to go to court to challenge the Association's decision within 6 months of the repossession

SECTION 5

TENANCY END BY DEATH

- 5.1 The Association's policy and procedures on succession deals in detail with how succession requests are processed. The Association's procedure on the death of a tenant provides guidance to staff on how to deal with such situations
- 5.2 When we receive notification of a tenant's death, without succession taking place, a period of up to two weeks will be allowed for the house to be cleared. Depending on the individual circumstances of the case, and at the discretion of the Association, this period may be extended by a maximum of a further two weeks
- 5.3 The tenancy will officially end upon the date of death of a tenant. Rights to housing benefit entitlement normally end on the death of a tenant. The Association has the discretion to claim the tenant's estate for the period in which the clear out of the property takes place
- 5.4 In the majority of tenant deaths, the Association are advised of the death by the next of kin who take responsibility for all necessary arrangements. They will be asked to produce a death certificate to establish the date of the tenancy end and the identity of the deceased
- 5.5 The next of kin normally arranges to clear the property of furniture and personal effects. The association has the discretion to assist by clearing out items of furniture where disposal is requested.
- 5.6 In the event of no next of kin being coming forward, the Association will work with other departments to actively trace a next of kin. Strathclyde Police will be the main partner in this case.
- 5.7 If no next of kin can be identified, Strathclyde Police will liaise with the Local Authority who has a legal obligation to arrange and cover the cost of a funeral.
- 5.8 The Procurator Fiscal is likely to become involved in the case of a sudden, suspicious, accidental or unexplained death. They will also make preliminary enquiries on behalf of the Queens and Lord Treasurers Remembrancer (QLTR) where no next of kin can be traced.
- 5.9 The Association will work with all relevant agencies as deemed necessary in each individual case. The QLTR will have the authority on the instruction of disposal of the household contents

SECTION 6

TENANCY END BY EVICTION

6.1 The process for eviction is dealt with under the Association's policy and procedures for rent arrears. The tenancy termination date is the date that an eviction takes place

SECTION 7

OTHER TENANCY TERMINATIONS

7.1 There are other circumstances where tenancy terminations will not result in properties being classified as void. These are detailed below, and the processing of such tenancy ends will be dealt with under their own individual policies and procedures;

- Mutual exchange
- Assignment / subletting
- Succession
- Joint to single tenancies/ single to joint tenancies/ abandonment of joint tenancies

SECTION 8

MANAGING VOIDS & LETTABLE STANDARDS

8.1 The association manages its voids in a way that protects the property, neighbouring properties and residents. We work efficiently to carry out repair works and identify potential new tenants within in the shortest possible timescale

8.2 Where necessary we will arrange security, or take other precautionary safety measures, of a property where it is deemed at risk. This will be done when we are satisfied the house is no longer occupied or at the point keys are made available to us

8.3 If keys are not returned in line with the tenancy termination date, rent will be charged until the keys are handed in or the association is forced to gain access. Legal advice will be sought in these cases.

8.4 We will carry out a full assessment of the repair condition of the property and order work appropriate to bring the house up to the Association's lettable standard. This inspection will be carried out as soon as keys are available.

- 8.5 We will assess the quality of the decoration of the outgoing tenant and establish any potential entitlement to assist with decoration. This will be done in line with the Association's decoration policy
- 8.6 We will aim to carry out all repair work within a maximum timescale of 5 working days. We will post inspect the quality of work carried out in void properties in every instance to ensure the quality of workmanship is acceptable to the Association.
- 8.7 We will ensure copies of gas, electric and energy performance certificates are available to issue to new tenants
- 8.8 We will publicise our lettable void standard and ensure every prospective tenant is issued with a copy before they make a decision on whether or not to accept the offer of a tenancy
- 8.9 During the void period, housing staff will be responsible for ensuring that weekly visual inspections of the exterior of the property take place. Any security, which has been tampered with or vandalised will be rectified immediately

SECTION 9

LETTING THE PROPERTY

- 9.1 The Association's Allocation Policy details how the Association will allocate its void properties. New tenants will be liable for rental payments from their date of entry and the property will be habitable from that date.
- 9.2 Staff will carry out a settling in visit within 28 days from the tenancy start date to ensure the void property is fully occupied

SECTION 10

RECORDS, COMPLAINTS & REPORTING

- 10.1 Computer records will be maintained up to date to show details of our inspections, findings, outcomes and all other associated void management work.
- 10.2 Wherever possible we will deal with void management complaints "on the spot". Where this can't be achieved we aim to deal with any non urgent complaints within 5 working days. Where matters are likely to take longer to investigate, we will aim to resolve within 20 working days in line with our complaints procedure.
- 10.3 The Housing Services Subcommittee will receive reports on;

- Rent lost due to void properties (on a rental period basis)
- Turnover of stock and numbers of lettable voids (on a rental period basis)
- Offers of housing made including reasons for refusal (on a quarterly basis)
- Average relet times of void properties (on a rental period basis)
- No of repairs issued to void properties (on a monthly basis)
- Spend on void properties (via quarterly management accounts)
- Ad hoc reports on any pertinent issues relating to difficult to let property

SECTION 11

TRAINING, REVIEW & DISTRIBUTION

- 11.1 The Association is committed to training and developing staff and committee members to their full potential in order to deliver a high quality of service in all areas.
- 11.2 This Policy will be approved by the Housing Services Sub Committee. It will be reviewed on a 3 yearly cycle. The review will incorporate changes in legislation, complaints, comments and feedback from customers.
- 11.3 This policy will be made available to every employee and committee member and will be made freely available to any tenant or interested party.

SECTION 12

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment involves assessing the likely or actual effects of policies or services to our customers in respect of their disability, age, gender, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation or gender identity to ensure equal and fair access for all. It helps us make sure the needs of people are taken into account when we develop and implement a new policy or service or when we make a change to a current policy or service.

END OF POLICY