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# Void Management Policy

<b>Policy Title:</b>	<b>Void Management Policy</b>
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## **Vision**

***By providing aspirational homes and high-quality services we will transform communities to enhance the quality of life of our customers.***

## **Values**

- ***Customer and Community Focused***
- ***Treating our customers with respect***
- ***Accountable***
- ***Making a difference***
- ***Innovative***
- ***Equal access to services and opportunities for all***

## **Strategic Objectives**

- ***Deliver first class customer services***
- ***Provide quality homes, communities and sustainable tenancies***
- ***Achieve robust financial management and governance excellence***
- ***Empower, develop and engage our staff***
- ***Build strong collaborative relationships locally and nationally***

# **Void Management Policy**

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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 982 properties. Of these, 541 were improved through a full tenemental rehabilitation scheme, while the remaining are new build houses, cottage flats and tenements.
- 1.2 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.
- 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 2022 outcomes 4 and 13 which states that: -  
  
**Outcome 4 (Quality of Housing)** – 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 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 adhere to Scottish Housing Regulatory Framework 2019 standard 3 which states that: -

**Standard 3 – The registered social landlord manages its resources to ensure its financial well-being, while maintaining rents at a level tenants can afford to pay**

- 2.4 To minimise financial losses resulting from properties being void.
- 2.5 To ensure that tenants are fully aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to giving notice to end the tenancy and the condition in which the property must be left.
- 2.6 To keep void properties in a safe and well-kept condition for the protection of tenants, the property and general appearance of the area.
- 2.7 To bring void properties to a lettable standard as quickly as possible and 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, consult with tenants and amend our policy and practice as required.

**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. Information is also contained on Ardenglen's website and periodically in newsletters. Tenants leaving will also be sent the link via text or email for our end of tenancy you tube video.
- 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 and Asset staff will arrange to visit the property jointly during the notice period to assess the repair and decoration standard and discuss any other matters relating to the tenancy such as qualification to the Right to Repair Compensation Scheme. Details of this discussion will be sent to the outgoing tenant following the visit.
- 3.6 Tenants who are moving internally must be visited by the housing officer prior to a formal offer of accommodation being made to ensure that tenancy obligations are met.
- 3.7 Outgoing tenants will always be encouraged to provide up to date contact details including a forwarding address if the Association requires getting in touch after keys are handed in.
- 3.8 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 abandonments 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, an abandonment checklist will be completed 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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 tenancy changes deals in detail with how succession to tenancy requests are processed. This section provides guidance for staff to deal with tenancy end by death.
- 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 termination of a Universal Credit claim will be at the end of the relevant assessment period. The Association has the discretion to claim the tenant's

estate for the period in which the clear out of the property takes place. Legal advice will be sought in such cases

- 5.4 In most 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 requests that the keys are returned within 14 days unless there are complex circumstances in which case this would extend to 28 days. The association has the discretion to assist by clearing out items of furniture where disposal is requested. If the next of kin is unwilling or unable to clear the property they will be asked to sign a mandate authorising disposal of the contents.
- 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. Police Scotland will be the main partner in this case.
- 5.7 If no next of kin can be identified, Police Scotland 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.
- 5.10 Where no next of kin has been identified and the QLTR and/or Police provides authorisation, a full inventory will be compiled, and photographs taken.

## **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 our tenancy management policy 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 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, we will write to the address giving a date when forced access will take place and confirming that the date of the forced access will be the termination date and that rent will be charged up to this date.
- 8.4 We will carry out a full assessment of the repair condition of the property and arrange for necessary repairs to bring the house up to the Association's lettable standard (APPENDIX 1). 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 with line with the Association's decoration policy.
- 8.6 We will aim to carry out all repair work within a maximum timescale of 10 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 decide on whether to accept the offer of a tenancy.
- 8.9 During the void period, Asset 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. If a property is void for longer than 120 days we will comply with the requirements of our insurers which will involve an intensive monitoring programme.

## **SECTION 9**

### **ALLOCATING THE PROPERTY**

- 9.1 Housing Officer will actively seek to offer a property within the notice period, where possible they will arrange to carry out viewings prior to the outgoing tenant leaving and with their permission.
- 9.2 The Associations 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 Housing Officer / Assistant will carry out a settling in visit within 6 weeks from the tenancy start date to ensure the void property is fully occupied.

## **SECTION 10**

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 10.1 The following table provides a high-level summary of each responsible individual and their role within the void management process.

<b>Staff Member</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Director of Customer Services	Overarching responsibility of performance and adherence to policy/procedure/legislative requirements of Customer Services Team. Liaise with Director of Asset Management to ensure effective joint working of both teams to achieve a common outcome. Review policy every 3 years.

Director of Asset Management	Overarching responsibility of performance and adherence to policy/procedure/legislative requirements of Asset Management Team. Liaise with Director of Customer Services to ensure effective joint working of both teams to achieve a common outcome. Assist with review of policy every 3 years and review procedures. Ensure sufficient budgetary funding available to deliver void standard.
Senior Housing Officer / Senior Asset Officer	Performance monitoring and adherence to policy/procedure/legislative requirements of Customer Services & Asset Team. Review procedures following policy review.
Housing Officer	Ensure excellent communication with tenants & colleagues within the Asset team regarding key management for outgoing and new prospective tenants. Attend jointly end of tenancy inspection with the Asset team. Adherence to void policy/procedures relating to tenancy ends. Ensure min void standard is issued to prospective tenants. Ensure completion and accuracy of Void Module entries.
Asset Officer	Ensure excellent communication with colleagues within Housing Team regarding void days and any delays; Attend pre-termination visits jointly with Housing Officer; Ensure excellent communication with contractors, clear description of works to comply with minimum void standard, and clear timescale for completions, monitor contractor performance and complete 100% post inspection of works; Ensure completion and accuracy of Void Module entries; Attend contractor progress meetings and assess performance based on agreed KPIs.
Housing Assistant	In the absence of the Housing Officer assisting with all void processes; ensuring excellent communication with colleagues; key management for outgoing and new prospective tenants; Adherence to void policy/procedures relating to tenancy ends; Ensure min void standard is issued to prospective tenants; Ensure completion and accuracy of Void Module entries.
Asset & Compliance Assistant	In the absence of the Asset Officer assist with all void processes. Ensure excellent communication with colleagues and arranging utilities through Void Care; liaising with staff for completion of outstanding

	compliance works; provision of all compliance documentation stored on SDM.
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## **SECTION 11**

### **RECORDS, COMPLAINTS & MONITORING**

- 11.1 Computer records will be maintained up to date to show details of our inspections, findings, outcomes and all other associated void management work.
- 11.2 Wherever possible we will deal with void management complaints “on the spot”. Where this can’t be achieved, we will adhere to the association’s timescales within our Complaints Policy.
- 11.3 The Audit, Performance, Risk and Assurance Sub-committee will receive quarterly reports identifying the following details:
- Rent lost due to void properties
  - Average relet times of void properties
  - Spend on void properties via quarterly management accounts

## **SECTION 12**

### **EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY**

- 12.1 This policy will be implemented in line with our Equality and Diversity Policy 2021 and is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment to assess the likely or actual effects of the policy to applicants in respect of their disability, age, gender, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation or gender identity to ensure equal and fair access for all.

## **SECTION 13**

### **TRAINING, REVIEW & DISTRIBUTION**

- 13.1 The Association is committed to training and developing staff and board members to their full potential in order to deliver a high quality of service in all areas.
- 13.2 This Policy will be approved by the Board of Management on a 3 yearly cycle. The review will incorporate changes in legislation, complaints, comments and feedback from customers.

13.3 This policy will be made available to every employee and will be made freely available to any customer or interested party via our website [www.ardenglen.co.uk](http://www.ardenglen.co.uk) or by request.

**Void Letting Standard (reviewed Feb 2024)**

As part of our tenancy change process, Ardenglen Housing Association carry out an inspection of our empty houses to assess the level of repair work required in order to bring each of our properties up to an acceptable standard for a new occupier to move in. The following provides information on the repair standard that can be expected at the start of a tenancy;

Minimum standard	Works
General cleanliness	The house will be cleared of furniture, rubbish and belongings from the previous occupier. Floors will be swept out and kitchen and bathroom surfaces washed down including inside of cupboards and windows.
Locks	The property will have the locks changed on the front and back doors (where applicable) and 2 sets of keys will be available. 2 door fobs and 1 common back door key will be provide where applicable.
Windows	All windows throughout the property will be fully operational and checked for safety
Kitchen units	All kitchen units will be checked and hinges replaced and adjusted as necessary. All kitchen drawers will be fully operational. Kitchen worktops may have some wear and tear but should be free from deep scratches or multiple dents/burns.
Electrics	All electrics will be checked and deemed safe as per IEE standards and a copy of the certificate issued to new tenants. Energy Saving light bulbs will be installed throughout the house
Gas	Houses with gas central heating will have a full safety check undertaken and a copy of the compliance certificate will be issued to new tenants. Any gas supply for cooking facilities will be capped and new tenant can arrange for this to be removed at time of fitting their gas cooker. Tenants require to have a cooker manual for Ardenglen gas engineers to connect new cookers.
Legionella control	Water will be run from all outlets and a new shower hose and head will be provided where applicable.
Smoke alarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One smoke alarm installed in the living room and in every circulation space on each storey such as hallways and landings</li> <li>• One heat alarm installed in every kitchen</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All alarms should be interlinked</li> </ul>
Bathroom fitments	All sanitary ware will be free from chips and cracks (including the bath panel). Where showers are installed, these will be in working order and have a shower curtain and appropriate wall coverings. A new shower head and hose will be fitted.
Floor coverings	Generally these will be removed, unless they are deemed to be in a reasonable condition. These will not be maintained by the association.
Water supply	We will ensure a supply of running water in the kitchen and bathroom
Skirtings and facings	Missing or broken skirtings and facings will be repaired or replaced as required
Sinks and wash hand basins	Sinks and wash hand basins will be free from chips and will be securely fitted with taps in working order and plugs and chains in place
External doors	Front, back and verandah doors will be secure and lock fast spy hole on front door.
Internal doors	All internal doors (including cupboards) will be intact and operating correctly. The kitchen door where present will be half hour fire rated. Bathrooms and toilets should have a locking device.
Wardrobes	Fitted wardrobes will have hanging rails in place
Walls	Any visible broken or loose plaster will be repaired throughout
Floorboards	All visible loose flooring will be re secured
Dampness & Mould	As part of the handover pack our maintenance officer will add "A guide to Dampness In Mould" booklet which provides good practice information to tenants on how to reduce dampness in there homes. Our properties are also inspected visually at VOID stage for dampness and mould and should any Observations be picked up they are treated on a Stage 1,2 and 3 basis which is recorded in the H/A files. Once the property has been allocated we will revisit (Est 6 Month) the property to post inspect previous issues to make sure there has been no reoccurrence
Garden areas/backcourts	Garden areas and communal backcourt areas will be maintained by the association through our landscaping contract. Refuse bin will be in place.
Fire Safety	The property has been visually checked to ensure compliance with all aspects of fire safety. Relevant doors have been checked to ensure operational and fully compliant along with fire escape windows where relevant. Additionally, the smoke and heat alarms have been tested and are in full working order.

The association is generally not responsible for the condition or level of decoration in a property. There may, however, be certain circumstances where the decoration is deemed to be so poor that a decoration allowance may be considered. Examples of this might be torn wallpaper or badly stained woodwork. The allowance will be of a

set amount per room as detailed in the association's decoration policy and will be awarded at Ardenglen's discretion.

*On some occasions non-essential repair work may be required after you sign your tenancy agreement. We try to minimise this where possible however if additional repair work is required you will be asked to provide access at a time that is suitable to you in order to complete this work.*