

REPORT TO: HOUSING COMMITTEE - 31 OCTOBER 2011

REPORT ON: VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

REPORT NO.: 454-2011

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the attached Void Management Policy. The policy sets the context for the Council's approach to re-letting empty houses, in light of the work of the Void Review Group. The associated procedure has been developed and has been implemented with the relevant staff.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to:

- i. approve the attached Policy;
- ii. approve the measurement of the performance of the Policy against SHR Performance Standards after one year, and thereafter as part of regular programme.

**3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial savings associated with the implementation of this policy will be reflected within the Housing Revenue Account Estimates.

**4. MAIN TEXT**

The Void Review Group was set up in March 2011 to improve the Department's performance in re-letting houses. One of the first tasks identified was to create a comprehensive procedure and to provide the overall framework for that and other initiatives in the form of the Policy.

The policy draws on good practice identified from other social landlords, but, most importantly, follows the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator as laid down in "Performance Standards for Social Landlords", in particular, "Activity Standard 1.5: Void Management" (copy appended).

The policy in particular does the following:

- Identifies which are the main staff groups for whom the policy is relevant. These staff groups have been involved in comprehensive training over the summer.
- Sets out the aims and objectives of the policy itself. These in particular have been reflected in the new Procedure and the training staff have received.
- Outlines the legal requirements.

- Closely defines what a void property is.
- Emphasises the need for Efficiency and Value for Money.

The Policy identifies a number of monitors for controlling our performance in re-letting empty houses, and a further range are in development, for example challenging void stage targets i.e. times for re-let inspection, times for void repairs, decoration, cleaning, viewing, offers, signing etc.

## 5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>

## 6. **CONSULTATIONS**

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Director of Finance and all Chief Officers have been consulted in the preparation of this report. No concerns were expressed.

## 7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

Elaine Zwirlein  
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

September 2011

## APPENDIX

### Scottish Housing Regulator Performance Standards

#### Activity Standard 1.5: Void Management

##### Self Assessment

**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of your void management process:**

- Are our void management policies, procedures and practices clear and consistent with established good practice and legislative requirements?
- Do we explain to tenants their responsibilities relating to termination of tenancy?
- Do we ensure that all relevant departments and partner agencies are notified of the void/prospective void?
- Do we provide prospective tenants with good quality information about the property offered, such as viewing arrangements, rent levels, amenities, transport and shopping facilities, schools, and tenants' groups and representatives?
- Do we have procedures for the recovery of abandoned property that minimise vacant periods, and comply with legislative requirements?
- Do we have clear procedures for the disposal of abandoned or unclaimed personal belongings left in an abandoned property?
- Do we have challenging targets and timescales for each stage of the voids process?
- Do we provide all relevant staff and partners with accurate and timely performance information to enable them to effectively monitor and manage the voids process?
- Do we collect and analyse refusal information to inform the management of our housing list?
- Do we report our performance in the management of voids to tenants, prospective tenants and other stakeholders?

**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the standard of your relets:**

- Do we have clear relet standards for all our stock?
- Do our relet standards meet all relevant statutory requirements and reflect good practice in relation to standards of safety and security?
- Do we publicise our relet standards, so that prospective tenants know what to expect?
- Are our tenants satisfied with the condition of the properties let to them?
- Do we consult tenants and prospective tenants on the development and review of our relet standards?

**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your approach to the management of low demand**

- Have we put in place appropriate strategies to tackle areas of low demand?
- Do we have robust arrangements for monitoring the impact of our strategies?

**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about void management and sustainability**

- Does our approach to void management, together with our management of estates and anti-social behaviour, positively contribute to sustainable communities?
- Do we use results from void property inspections and refusal information to inform our longer-term maintenance investment plans and priorities?

# Dundee City Council

## Housing Department

### Void Management Policy

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Dundee City Council will operate a Voids Management Policy and associated Procedure for re-letting properties that become vacant. The Housing Department will ensure that all staff responsibilities are clear in relation to Voids Management. Staff will have overall responsibility for operating, co-ordinating and monitoring the Policy.

This Policy is relevant to the following Staff Teams:

- Housing Managers
- Lettings Staff
- Housing Officers
- Advice and Information Staff
- Environment Department Staff

#### 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1. Dundee City Council Housing Department is committed to demonstrating excellence in our approach to void management. This policy aims to ensure that the Housing Department complies with relevant legislation, good practice and the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator. It also aims to provide clarity and understanding of our void management processes for staff. This Policy and the Void Procedure aim to ensure that the Housing Department:

- Maximises rental income by re-letting properties as quickly as possible.
- Lets all properties to tenants in an appropriate agreed lettable standard.
- Sets challenging targets for each stage of the letting process.
- Operates to a clear set of Service Standards.
- Makes clear to tenants their duties on terminating a tenancy and what they should expect from the Council when they enter a new tenancy.
- Has clear and consistent monitoring and reporting arrangements and uses monitoring information to effect improvement.
- Monitors tenants' satisfaction with properties and information about refusals to inform policy and procedure development.

- Regularly reviews the Policy and associated Procedures to ensure that they continue to comply with good practice, legislation and the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- Maintains robust procedures that allow the Void Management Policy to be fulfilled.
- Provides regular training to all relevant groups of staff so that they are fully aware of their role and what is required of them.

### 3. **LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

3.1. This Policy conforms with the following Legislation and Guidance:

- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- Scottish Housing Regulator Performance Standard AS1.5 Void Management “We monitor demand for our houses and maximise the use of available housing, keeping empty properties and spaces in our shared accommodation to a minimum. We make sure that our properties are of an appropriate lettable standard.

### 4. **VOIDS DEFINITION**

4.1. A ‘void’ is the term used to describe a property, bedsit, flat or room that has become empty for the following reasons:

- The tenant has given notice that they are terminating the tenancy.
- Keys for the property have been returned to a District Office without notice.
- The property has been abandoned.
- The tenant has died, leaving no eligible successor.
- The tenant has been evicted, or the property has otherwise been re-possessed.
- A lease or memorandum type tenancy has been terminated.

### 5. **EFFICIENCY AND VALUE FOR MONEY**

5.1. The Housing Department will:

- Set clear definitions of what constitutes minor works and major repairs.
- Minimise the percentage of the housing stock that is void at any one point in time.
- Minimise the void turn-over period from the point of tenancy termination to tenant allocation and keep our re-let times to a minimum.
- Monitor the length of time that properties remain void and report back on this to relevant internal and external stakeholders.

- Have robust procedures for managing voids and for introducing improvements to address concerns that arise that affect performance, value for money and resident satisfaction.
- Encourage residents to leave their property in a clean and reasonable condition.
- Enforce conditions set out in the tenancy agreement, including the notice period and payment for rechargeable repairs.
- Undertake risk assessments before carrying out asbestos checks, and lock changes.

## 6. **RENT ARREARS AND RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS**

We will pursue former tenants for any money that they owe us for rent or rechargeable repairs, for example as a result of wilful damage.

## 7. **EQUALITY**

- 7.1. Dundee City Council is committed to providing fair and equal treatment for all its service users and we will not discriminate on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, belief, age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family circumstances, employment status, physical ability or mental health.
- 7.2. We will take into account the diverse needs of our tenants and potential service users and will be flexible and innovative in its response to issues of literacy, language, diversity and learning disability.
- 7.3. We will check our policies and associated procedures regularly for their equality and diversity implications, taking appropriate action to address inequalities likely to result or resulting from their implementation.
- 7.4. This policy has been fully race equality impact assessed as required by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and is considered to be compliant with the Act, using the EQIA Document.

## 8. **REVIEW AND CONSULTATION**

- 8.1. This policy will be reviewed after two years, or sooner if we require to respond to significant changes in legislation or changes in practice. Consultation over the policy review will involve all relevant staff, tenants and other agencies as required. The policy will be published on the Dundee City Council website.

## 9. **LINKS WITH OTHER POLICIES/PROCEDURES**

Other Policies and Procedures linked with this Policy include:

Lettings Procedure

Abandonment Procedure

Sign-up Procedure

## Performance Monitoring

In order to monitor and manage void performance, the following measures will be reported:

Number of Days to re-let properties this month cumulatively, by band.

Average re-let times per month and cumulatively.

Value of Rent Loss due to void properties, per month and cumulatively.

Numbers of Refusal, after viewing, per month and cumulatively.

Refusals per month and cumulatively by reason for refusal.

Number of Offers per let.

Average cost of relets.

Properties Void over 16 weeks monitored weekly.

Lettings and termination data monitored weekly.

Number of properties undergoing major repair and the duration of the repair.