Void Management Policy

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Confidentiality	C1
Distribution list	HSH Operational Staff, HSH Board of Trustees, HSH Tenants
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1. Overview

The Void Management Policy outlines HSH's approach to managing void (empty) properties in order that properties are returned to occupation promptly, safely and to an appropriate standard, seeking to meet tenant expectations and the requirements of the Regulatory of Social Housing and other applicable statutory requirements.

The purpose of this policy is to facilitate the efficient and effective repair of empty properties and to ensure that empty properties are brought up to a "lettable" standard before a new tenant move in. HSH will allocate all void properties as quickly as practicable, in line with our Allocations Policy, to minimise vacant properties and loss of income.

The turnover of housing stock is an integral part of social housing provision that inevitably results in periods where properties/bed spaces are void. HSH is aware that good management of void properties and the limitation of void periods is vital to maximise rental income, provide a quality service and meet local housing need.

2. Policy Scope

This policy applies to all HSH tenants in general needs accommodation. It covers all breaches of tenancy agreements including, but not limited to, rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, property condition issues, and other contractual obligations. It is noted that third parties and managing agents who manage accommodation on behalf of HSH may take their own approach to void management, but it is expected that their policy would reflect the core principles set out in this policy.

3. Regulatory and Legal Framework

This policy complies with HSH's duties under the following legislation:

- Social Housing Regulation Act 2023
- Regulator of Social Housing Standards
    - Safety & Quality Standard – requires registered providers to ensure properties are safe, decent and fit for occupation before letting.
    - Tenancy Standard – requires homes to be allocated and let in a fair and transparent manner and promotes the efficient use of housing stock.
- Decent Homes Standard 2006

Effective void management supports the efficient use of housing assets, assists in meeting local housing need and contributes to HSH's financial viability and charitable objects.

4. Principles

Hawes Street Housing recognises that effective management of void properties is important to maximise the availability of affordable homes and avoid any negative impact on communities and neighbourhoods, in addition to the important financial impact of having void properties. It is essential that HSH has an effective and efficient system in place to manage void properties and limit as far as possible, the length of time that they remain void, therefore minimising the amount of rental income lost through voids.

HSH aims to minimise the number of empty properties in its stock, the length of time that they are empty and void cost repairs. At the same time, it aims to assist the local authority in fulfilling their statutory duties towards identified local housing need via provision of a decent home with tailored support to sustain accommodation.

HSH aims to ensure that properties are available to re-let at the earliest opportunity. This means managing the stock efficiently to prevent unnecessary delays and to:

- Develop a consistent, coordinated, measurable and effective approach to achieve the best possible service
- Monitor performance against re-let targets and for each aspect of dealing with void properties
- Ensure that vacant properties are left empty for the minimum amount of time
- Ensure the tenant does not suffer any unnecessary delays obtaining a property
- Ensure that HSH does not incur any unnecessary loss of income.

By adopting these aims, HSH seeks to ensure that:

- tenants receive a good, consistent standard of property when they sign a new tenancy agreement
- staff work together in a co-ordinated approach to proactively manage the voids process
- Saltbox Property Services staff take a co-ordinated approach to get properties repaired to the right standard and as quickly as possible, including working with external contractors where required
- there are good systems of communication and information sharing in use
- performance is effectively monitored and evaluated
- all legal responsibilities and good practice in relation to void management are adhered to

5. Void Control

HSH aims to minimise voids by:

- Supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies and manage their accommodation successfully
- Maintaining prompt selection and allocation
- Allocating tenants to properties via the Allocations Policy
- Maintenance of close, ongoing relationships with referral agencies
- Distribution of service information and marketing material
- Maintaining highest possible standards of quality and presentation of accommodation
- Completing full clean of void properties prior to move in
- Conducting regular property checks and identifying required maintenance work & repairs
- Conducting regular Health and Safety checks of all properties

- Ensuring property inspections, cleaning, repairs and improvements are implemented promptly as properties/bed spaces are vacated
- Training all staff in the management of void properties to ensure void periods are kept to a minimum and an acceptable lettable standard for our properties is achieved and maintained.
- Seeking to continually improve the service.

HSH will work with tenants to support them to sustain their tenancy and manage their accommodation successfully. Tenants who may be at risk of losing their accommodation will receive proactive, preventative support including partnering with other services and agencies to provide support where appropriate. HSH will provide sanctions, along with intensive support, to reduce the risk of tenancies ending unsuccessfully and properties becoming void. We will seek to minimise unnecessary voids through ongoing tenant support and effective housing management.

6. Void Management

A void property is defined as a habitable dwelling for which there is no current occupant. A void property is could therefore be:

- Where a tenant has formally terminated the tenancy by written notice
- By abandonment, where the appropriate legal notices have been service in accordance with our Abandoned Homes Policy.
- By eviction, where the appropriate legal notices have been served in accordance with our Eviction Procedure.
- By transfer, where a tenant has been internally moved to an alternative property.
- Where a tenant is taken into institutional care
- On the death of a client
- Where new properties are taken on or purchased, but not ready to let

When HSH becomes aware that a property is due to, or has become vacant, action will be taken to minimise the length of time it remains empty. When a property is empty, HSH will:

- Record and remove left belongings,
- Conduct a void inspection
- Determine required maintenance work/refurbishment and estimated date of completion
- Identify any planned maintenance which would be suitable to complete during this void period to ensure efficiency of work and value for money
- Seek to procure all works within the specified timescale
- Complete a thorough cleanse of the property
- Ensure that completed properties are of a lettable standard

A “lettable” standard ensures that all properties are compliant with the Decent Homes Standard at the point of letting. HSH will ensure that at the point of occupancy the property will be:

- A fit, safe and secure home
- Structurally sound and where possible energy efficient
- Weather tight, damp free and properly ventilated
- Ready for all operating connections to the main utilities
- Provided with a fully functioning gas central heating or other type of heating system
- Installed with a smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector

- Decorated to a lettable standard
- Health and Safety compliant with a valid gas safety certificate (CP12), EICR (Electrical Installation Condition Report) and EPC (Energy Performance Certificate).
- Cleaned to a lettable standard.

Prior to re-letting a property, HSH will ensure all statutory compliance requirements have been met. This includes obtaining a valid Gas Safety Certificate (CP12), a valid Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) and a valid Energy Performance Certificate with a minimum rating of E (or higher). Copies of these certificates should be issued to the new tenant. Notice of any repairs that will be carried out post occupation should also be provided prior to the tenancy start.

During the void period, the Housing Officer will allocate a new tenant from the waiting list to move in as soon as the property is available. This minimises financial loss and creates a home for someone who needs it. This will be undertaken in line with Allocations Policy.

7. Disposal of Personal Belongings (TORT)

We will advise clients and tenants that goods must be cleared prior to exiting service and that any furnishings or belongings left in a property will be stored by HSH for a period of 4-weeks. Any small valuable items, and items containing personal information will be retained by HSH for a period of 6 months in secure storage, before being disposed of. No items will be retained by staff or gifted to other clients.

Where items are retained by HSH, a TORT form will be completed including photographs of goods in situ, details of belongings and where they are stored. Reasonable effort will be made to contact former clients or tenants before disposing of personal/valuable belongings.

8. Value for Money

HSH will balance speed to re-let with cost effective repair decisions. Void costs and rent loss will be monitored proportionately and reviewed to support continuous improvement and compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's value for money expectations. In some cases, it may be prudent to carry out Planned Maintenance during a void period, even when the planned maintenance is not scheduled until future years. This approach ensures efficiency of maintenance works and minimises disruption to occupation.

9. Monitoring and Review

Performance information, including average void turnaround times and rent loss, will be reviewed by management and reported to the Board on a periodic basis. This policy will be reviewed at least every three years or sooner if there are changes in legislation or regulatory requirements.

10. Responsibilities

- The Company Secretary is responsible for the monitoring and review of this policy.
- The Hawes Street Housing Operations Manager is responsible for ensuring the implementation of this policy and supporting procedures for the maintenance of all necessary records on the In-Form CRM system to enable the compilation of regular monitoring of performance.
- The Saltbox Property Services Manager and HSH Housing Officer are responsible for the day-to-day management and oversight of this policy.