



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

January 2013

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy outlines how the council intends to provide high quality homes and sustainable lettings by delivering a cost efficient void management service.

2. Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 The main aim of the policy is to achieve the right balance between speedy turnaround of empty properties and ensuring that they are of a standard that is acceptable to new tenants.
- 2.2 In dealing with empty properties, the council's overall objective is to minimise the number of empty properties, the time that properties stand empty and the resulting rent loss.

3. Effective Working Practices

- 3.1 Void management involves tenants, the housing/maintenance team and the Council's repairs contractor. The council will seek to achieve clear and effective communication and joint working between all parties involved in the process, to deliver the best possible service. For example the council will:
 - establish a re-let standard for empty properties, so that an appropriate balance is struck between minimising expenditure and establishing reasonable standards for customers
 - involve customers in setting standards (eg by discussing with them policy matters such as the re-let standard and the number of offers of rehousing which applicants may receive)
 - pre-allocate properties before they become empty, wherever possible
 - set targets for each aspect of dealing with empty properties, and monitor its performance in achieving these
 - compare its performance with that of other local authorities
 - aim to achieve continuous improvement in its performance and in the standard of service offered to customers
- 3.2 The council will adopt practices that achieve the appropriate balance between speed of turnaround, cost and satisfaction and these will be under constant review.

4. Tenancy Termination

- 4.1 All tenants are required to give four weeks written notice to vacate their property.

4.2 When a valid notice is received, all outgoing tenants will be advised of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy. Officers will also arrange inspection of the property prior to the tenancy ending to:

- Agree any improvements (made by the tenant) which are eligible for compensation
- Identify any rechargeable repairs
- Identify and notify the repairs team of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning
- Identify any factors which should be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, such as special adaptations
- Identify repairs that the tenant may be able to carry out before they leave, for example, redecoration, clearing gardens

4.3 Tenants are encouraged to leave the property, garage and garden areas in a clean and tidy condition, allow minor repairs to be carried out and return keys on or before the notice expiry date. The outgoing tenant will be responsible for the full costs for clearing out the property or other rechargeable repairs if applicable.

4.4 Where a tenant hands in the keys prior to the termination of the Notice to Quit, the council will accept this as surrender by mutual agreement. Void property procedures will be implemented immediately on receipt of the keys to enable the property to be re-let as soon as possible.

4.5 Where the keys are not returned, the cost of gaining access to change locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant.

5. End of Tenancy with Inadequate Notice

5.1 Where tenants leave a property without the required 28 day notice, the council will try to contact them using any telephone numbers or addresses they have previously supplied to advise them of their responsibility to clear the rent due for the full 28 day notice period, and of any costs which are due (e.g. for clearing the property, or for rechargeable repairs). The tenant will also be asked to sign a termination notice.

6. Abandoned Properties

6.1 Where it is suspected that a property has been abandoned, the statutory procedures will be followed.

6.2 Abandonment checks carried out may include:

- letters being sent to the tenants' address and any contact address
- visits made at different times of day
- the status of the rent account being verified
- checks made with housing benefit and local utilities companies

- checks with the police, local hospitals and social work departments, as well as with neighbours and employers (where appropriate)
- 6.3 If it is established that a property has been abandoned a notice will be served on the tenant of the council's intention to recover the property. If the property remains abandoned at the end of this notice period following all checks, the Council is then entitled to take possession of the house without further proceedings.
- 6.4 Two members of staff should be in attendance when property is recovered, with both compiling a written inventory of goods remaining in the property which will be stored for 6 months. Copies of all relevant papers will be stored in the tenant/s' file.
- 6.5 Where a forced entry is required the Council will request police attendance.

7. Downsizing

- 7.1 The Council will operate a cash incentive scheme for downsizing as detailed in the council's Decant and Downsizing Policy. The value for money of any such scheme will be tested periodically.

8. Security

- 8.1 Wherever possible, the council will aim to introduce minimal and non-intrusive security on its void properties, using a risk management approach to determine the appropriate level of security.

9. Void Repairs

- 9.1 The council will identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible. All repairs will be completed to the council's [Letting Standard](#), whilst ensuring void costs are kept to a minimum.
- 9.2 Throughout the void repair process, repairs surveyors will take a proactive approach in ensuring that colleagues dealing with the letting of the property are kept closely informed of progress with repair works, and the anticipated date of the property being available for occupation. They will also advise whether properties which are undergoing void repair works can be viewed by the prospective new tenant, before repair works have been completed. Health and safety considerations are paramount in assessing whether properties can safely be viewed by prospective tenants during the void repair period.
- 9.3 All properties will be issued with electrical and gas safety certificates in compliance with legal requirements.

- 9.4 Repairs will be classified into two categories:
- Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty (including safety checks); and/or
 - Non-essential or minor repairs that can be completed once the new tenant has moved into the property.
- 9.5 The condition of the properties major components will be surveyed to ensure that the planned life cycles are in line with the needs of the property.
- 9.6 The Council will use the void period to bring forward any work that may cause major disruption to the incoming tenant, or may be difficult to undertake once the property is occupied, such as major or programmed improvement works.
- 9.7 All void work will be undertaken by the council's own work force or appointed contractors and post inspected to ensure work is completed to a satisfactory standard in relation to time and quality.

10. Managing Adapted Voids

- 10.1 In accordance with the council's [Disabled Adaptations Policy](#), and in order to make the most efficient use of existing facilities, the council will not routinely remove adaptations from empty properties. Where possible, the council will aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants with disabilities, and/or recycle any adaptations that are removed from a property.

11. New Tenancies

- 11.1 The Council aims to create sustainable tenancies and achieve a high level of customer satisfaction.
- 11.2 Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the [Council's Allocations Policy](#). They will receive a provisional offer of housing, subject to tenancy references and/or conducting a home visit to verify the information in their housing application. They will need to advise the council within 7 days whether they intend to accept this offer. The acceptance will be subject to them being able to view the property before making their final decision. At the viewing, the prospective new tenant will then need to advise the council whether they do accept the offer.
- 11.3 When a prospective tenant has indicated their acceptance of a vacant property, the tenancy will commence as soon as possible after all essential repairs are completed.
- 11.4 All tenancies start on a Monday.

11.5 The sign up process and visit can have a significant impact on the sustainability of tenancies. The Council will have supporting procedures to ensure effective measures are in place.

11.6 All new tenants will be given the opportunity to feed back their satisfaction with the void management process and standard of the property when let.

12. Targets for Void Repairs and Re-lets

12.1 To ensure that void management practices are as efficient as possible the council will work to target timescales in managing void properties which will be recorded on the void path of the housing system:

Void Event	Void Event Description	Void Event Date	Void Type	Property Reference	Void Event No
NTCE	NOTICE RECEIVED				1
VOID	Property Void				2
ACK1	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT LETTER SENT				3
TEME	TERMINATION MEMO SENT				4
GAR	GARDEN ASSESSMENT CARRIED OUT				5
KEYS	KEYS RECEIVED FROM TENANT				6
TERM	TENANCY TERMINATED				7
	KEYS RECEIVED BY VOID OFFICER				8
INSP	PROPERTY INSPECTED				9
WITC	WORKS ISSUED TO CONTRACTOR				10
PVWK	POST VOID WORKS IDENTIFIED				11
CKSI	CORE KEY SYSTEM INSTALLED				12
CKSA	KEY SAFE INSTALLED				13
NSFV	NOT SAFE FOR VIEWING				14
VIEW	VIEWING DATE				15
VIEO	VIEWING OUTCOME				16
RFL	READY FOR LETTING/OCCUPATION				17
SLET	SIGN UP LETTER TO TENANT				18
KEYT	KEYS TO NEW TENANT				19
LET	LET				20

12.2 Systems will be in place to monitor progress against agreed targets, and reported via the Housing Regulatory Panel on an annual basis.

12.3 Weekly internal monitoring meetings will be held to check the progress of all void properties against the Performance Indicator target times for the re-letting of properties (number of days from tenancy termination to new tenancy start date). These meetings will identify reasons behind delays in re-letting, including tenant refusals, and seek to identify solutions. Targets have been set for the re-letting of properties in the following categories. These take account of both the scale / extent of works as well as factors relating to lettings:

- Voids not requiring major works
- Voids requiring major works
- Voids that are Sheltered/elderly properties

13. Review and Monitoring

13.1 Procedures relating to this policy will also be periodically reviewed, and at least every 2 years, taking into account any operational issues that arise.

13.2 Review will take into account any changes in law and best practice.

14. Equality and Diversity

14.1 The council are committed to providing equal opportunities and valuing diversity.

14.2 This policy has been designed to be fully inclusive regardless of the gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religious belief, or disability of service users or residents.