

# **DRAFT**

**Mid Devon District Council**

**Void Management Policy**

**Policy Number: OBS 004**

**January 2019**

## Version Control Sheet

**Title:** Void Management Policy

**Purpose:** To review the Void Management Policy in accordance with good practice and relevant legislative requirements.

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**Consultation:** This document was sent out for consultation to the following:

Director of Operations  
Cabinet Member for Housing  
Tenants Together Group  
Group Managers  
Leadership Team

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Title	Date	Version Approved
Director of Operations	11/12/2018	V3.1
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Group Managers	11/12/2018	V3.0
Leadership Team		
Homes Policy Development Group		
Cabinet		

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This policy is designed to ensure that Mid Devon District Council has effective procedures in place to manage its empty stock quickly and efficiently.
- 1.2 As the Housing Revenue Account is funded from the income generated by the rental of its stock, the Void Management Policy focuses on the requirement to reduce the length of time a property is empty.

## **2.0 Scope**

- 2.1 The policy will ensure a forward looking and strategic approach to void management that will help to:
  - 2.1.1 Minimise rent loss through reducing the length of the void period;
  - 2.1.2 Minimise repair costs by making tenants aware of their responsibilities;
  - 2.1.3 Set out Mid Devon District Council's standards of repair for empty properties ensuring that all staff, contractors and tenants are aware of exactly what condition the Council expects of its empty properties;
  - 2.1.4 Set in place systems for monitoring the standards of void properties and customer satisfaction with their new home;
- 2.2 The policy, together with the Tenancy Agreement and Mid Devon Districts Council's Recharges Policy will guide staff in ensuring that tenants are aware of their repair responsibilities and end of tenancy obligations.

## **3.0 Ending tenancies**

- 3.1 You must give us at least four weeks' written notice to quit when you wish to end your Tenancy. All keys to your Property must be returned to our offices by 10.00am at the latest, on the following day after the Tenancy ends, or we reserve the right to charge you a further week's Use and Occupation charge. We will charge you full rent throughout the Notice period.
- 3.2 Before ending your Tenancy you must ensure that the Property (including outbuildings, sheds and lofts) is left clean and free from furniture and possessions. You must leave all of our fixtures and fittings intact and in the same condition as they were as at the start of your Tenancy, with the exception of fair wear and tear. If you fail to do this, you will be recharged the cost of any work deemed necessary by the Council in order to re-let the property.
- 3.3 We have a responsibility to carry out safety checks and routine repairs before re-letting a Property. Therefore if you are moving from your Property you must let us have access to carry out a 'pre-vacation' inspection before you vacate to carry out minor repairs and to show prospective tenants around your Property.

3.4 The Council actively encourages tenants to leave the property and external areas in a clean and tidy condition as laid out in the tenancy agreement. When a valid notice of termination is received, outgoing tenants will be reminded of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy. The Council will then arrange an inspection of the property before the tenant moves out. This will enable the Council to:

3.4.1 Agree any improvements which are eligible for compensation;

3.4.2 Identify any rechargeable repairs;

3.4.3 Identify and notify maintenance contractors of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning;

3.4.4 Identify any factors which will be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, such as special adaptations;

3.5 For the full terms and conditions relating to ending tenancies please refer to the tenancy agreement.

#### **4.0 Tenants Responsibilities**

4.1 Tenancy Agreements relating to Council houses set out which repairs Tenants are responsible for. It advises Tenants that they must keep their home in a reasonable condition, and leave it clean and tidy when they end their tenancy. It states that we will recharge the Tenant for the cost of making good any damage they have caused and clearing any damage they may have caused and cleaning any items left behind.

4.2 All other types of Tenancy Agreements set out the Tenant's responsibilities for repair and maintenance of land/property they are occupying.

4.3 Any rechargeable repairs will be identified where possible during the pre-void inspection and the tenant made aware of their responsibilities regarding these.

4.4 The outgoing tenant will be asked to sign the list of rechargeable repairs and this will be used as a checklist to ensure that their responsibilities have been met.

4.5 The Council reserve the right to recharge the outgoing tenant for any rechargeable works that were not visible during the pre-void inspection.

4.6 The outgoing tenant will be required to provide a forwarding address, as specified in their tenancy agreement.

4.7 On becoming available for letting, the property will be offered to a potential new tenant with minimal delay in accordance with policies relating to the Devon Home Choice scheme and/or our own allocations policies dependent upon the business need.

- 4.8 For the full terms and conditions relating to tenants responsibilities please refer to the tenancy agreement.

## **5.0 Pre-Void Inspection**

- 5.1 Any adaptations to the property, such as a flush-floor shower, wheelchair height kitchen cupboards and handrails etc. will be noted at this time. This information will be shared with the Neighbourhood team and the Adaptations Officer, so that they are able to offer the property to an appropriate prospective tenant.
- 5.2 The outgoing tenant should put any queries regarding rechargeable repairs raised at the time of the pre-void inspection to the Group Manager for Building Services via the complaints procedure.

## **6.0 Void Inspection**

- 6.1 Once the property becomes void, it will be re-inspected to confirm if the former tenant has complied with their end of tenancy obligations.
- 6.2 It will also enable the inspecting officer to identify any repairs that were not visible during the pre-void inspection that need to be recharged.

## **7.0 Repairs to Void Properties**

- 7.1 The Council aims to identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible.
- 7.2 All work undertaken in the property will be completed to the Void Standard (Annex A), which has been agreed with our tenants to ensure compliance with the Decent Homes Standard.
- 7.3 All properties will be issued with electrical and gas safety certificates in compliance with legal requirements where applicable.
- 7.4 To speed up re-let times, repairs will be classified into two categories:
- 7.4.1 Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty (including safety checks);
- 7.4.2 Non-essential or minor repairs that could be completed once the new tenant has moved into the property or prior to the outgoing tenant moving out. Any further damage to the property would be recharged back to the outgoing tenant;
- 7.5 The Council will ensure that properties are checked against the planned works programme to make the most cost effective use of resources. If a property falls into a geographical area where planned maintenance work is being undertaken, the property will be moved to the top of the planned maintenance list for these works to be completed as soon as possible.

- 7.6 Major repairs and any necessary Health and Safety works that would cause a high level of disruption to tenants or put their safety at risk, such as the removal of asbestos, and any damp or rot treatments will be completed prior to the start of the new tenancy.
- 7.7 Every attempt will be made to complete all repairs prior to the new tenant taking up their tenancy; however in some circumstances minor and/or non-essential repairs will be undertaken once the tenancy has commenced. These repairs and the timescales for their completion will be agreed with the new tenant. In all cases, these will be charged to the voids budget.
- 7.8 All void properties must have had a gas and electrical check, and have the necessary certificates in place before they can be deemed as ready to let. Copies of these plus an Energy Performance Certificate are given to the new tenant as part of the sign up process.

## **8.0 Internal Decoration**

- 8.1 The Council does not decorate properties before being let. It is the responsibility of the incoming tenant to decorate as they see fit.
- 8.2 Where the vacating tenant(s) has left the property with bold or hard to cover colours, or there is significant smoke staining, consideration will be given to the need to apply one coat of obliterating emulsion prior to re-letting. The previous tenant will be charged for the cost of all works of this nature.
- 8.3 The Council may provide a 'Paint Pack' (Annex B) to the new tenant in order to help them start to decorate their new home. The amount of paint provided will vary depending upon the size and condition of the property, and the quantities shown in Annex B are the maximum that may be provided.

## **9.0 Building Sustainable Neighbourhoods**

- 9.1 All prospective tenants are provided with information about the property attributes, and local neighbourhood facilities prior to viewing.
- 9.2 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. All tenancies start on a Monday.
- 9.3 All new tenants are given an opportunity to feed back their satisfaction with the void management process and standard of the property when let. New tenants will be visited within the first six weeks of their tenancy commencing. In summary the purpose of this visit will be:
- 9.3.1 To welcome the tenant and give an opportunity for them to ask any questions, raise any concerns, follow up on any outstanding issues;
- 9.3.2 To establish if they need any extra help setting up their home and identify any support needs the tenant may have;

9.3.3 To offer any advice about benefits that the tenant may be entitled to receive;

9.3.4 To discuss rent payment options or delays with outstanding Housing Benefit or the Housing Cost element for Universal Credit claimants;

9.3.5 To reinforce the terms of the tenancy agreement and the tenants' rights and responsibilities;

9.4 The sign up process and settling in visit has a significant impact on the sustainability of tenancies. The Council will ensure a range of supportive procedures and services are in place to ensure effective delivery.

## **10.0 Related Documents**

10.1 Tenancy Agreement

10.2 Recharges Policy

10.3 Decent Homes Standard

10.4 Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

## **11.0 Diversity Issues**

11.1 The Council is committed to providing a fair and equitable service to its tenants and leaseholders. Through the management of our empty properties the Council aims to treat all customers fairly, and with respect and professionalism regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status.

## **12.0 Monitoring and Customer Involvement**

12.1 Satisfaction with the service provided will be monitored through "settling in" visits and repairs satisfaction forms. Feedback received from these surveys will be used to inform amendments to the policy and thus improve the service provided.

## **13.0 Review**

13.1 This policy has been written in line with current relevant legislation. The policy will be reviewed and revised to reflect any legislation requirements and/or other guidance or good practice. The next review of this policy is due January 2029 and every 10 years thereafter.



## **Annex A**

### **1.0 Our Standard of Repair for Empty Properties**

- 1.1 We aim to provide a high quality void service to all our tenants and we rely on your comments and suggestions to help us improve this further.
- 1.2 We want our new tenants to move into properties that are safe, secure, clean, and in good condition.
- 1.3 All our empty properties will meet our statutory and contractual obligations, and the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

### **2.0 General** – Our properties will have:

- 2.1 Clean, hygienic facilities for preparing food.
- 2.2 Sanitary ware that is clean, functioning and hygienic.
- 2.3 An efficient heating system that is safe and easy to use.
- 2.4 Good thermal insulation.
- 2.5 Modern UPVC double glazed windows and external doors.
- 2.6 Mains-powered smoke alarm(s).
- 2.7 Mains-powered carbon monoxide alarm(s) - if the property has gas or solid fuel heating.

### **3.0 Decoration**

- 3.1 Tenants are responsible for all internal decorations.

### **4.0 Safety**

- 4.1 When tenants sign their tenancy agreement they will receive the following documents relating to their new home:
  - 4.1.1 Electrical test certificate;
  - 4.1.2 Gas appliance safety certificate (if the property has a gas supply);
  - 4.1.3 Solid fuel appliance safety certificate (if fitted);

### **5.0 Gardens**

- 5.1 If the property has a garden, all debris will be removed and grass will be 'rough cut'.

5.2 Fencing (if provided) will mark the boundaries of the property.

## **6.0 External Doors**

6.1 External doors to the property will be secure with at least 2 sets of keys.

6.2 Security chains will be fitted to the front and rear doors.

6.3 All doors in the property will open and close easily.

## **7.0 Internal Woodwork**

7.1 All internal woodwork will be free from serious damage or decay.

7.2 All new woodwork will be primed ready for painting.

## **8.0 Windows and Glazing**

8.1 Windows that are designed to open and close will do so.

8.2 All glazing will be intact.

## **9.0 Floors and Stairs**

9.1 All solid floors and floor tiling will be free of cracks or other faults that may cause injury.

9.2 All floorboards will be sound and secured. (We cannot guarantee that floorboards will not have some slight movement or creaking).

9.3 All parts of staircases will be secure and free from defects.

## **10.0 Kitchen**

10.1 If there is space in the kitchen, we will provide water and waste connections so that you can plumb in a washing machine. We will also provide a convenient power point below the worktop.

10.2 All kitchen units will be clean and in good condition.

10.3 Worktops will be clean and hygienic.

10.4 The kitchen sink top will be clean and in good condition.

10.5 All kitchens will have an electric cooker connection point (If the property has a gas supply, the kitchen may have a gas cooker connection as well).

## **11.0 Bathroom and Toilet**

- 11.1 The property will have a clean, functioning bath (or shower) and a wash hand basin.
- 11.2 Each toilet in the property will flush properly and have a new seat fitted for each tenancy.

## **12.0 Mains Service**

- 12.1 The property will have an electricity supply that has been tested prior to letting and is safe.
- 12.2 If the property has a gas supply, all fitted appliances will have been tested for safety prior to letting.
- 12.3 The property will have a water stopcock that is easy to operate and in working order (we will tell you where it is when you sign your tenancy agreement).

## **13.0 Heating and Hot Water**

- 13.1 The property will have space and water heating that is safe and ready to use.
- 13.2 We will give you a manual on how to use the heating system when you sign your tenancy agreement.
- 13.3 All gas appliances (where fitted) will be safe and serviced within the last 12 months.
- 13.4 Any solid fuel appliances (where fitted) will be safe and serviced in the last 12 months.
- 13.5 All electric storage heaters (where fitted) will be tested and be safe.

## **14.0 Energy Efficiency**

- 14.1 Loft spaces will be insulated to a minimum of 250mm where possible.
- 14.2 An Energy Performance Certificate will be provided by the Council when you sign up to your new tenancy.

## **15.0 Open fires and solid fuel appliances**

- 15.1 Where possible all fireplaces and hearths will be removed. The openings will be blocked up and vented, and chimneys taken down or capped as appropriate, to prevent further use.
- 15.2 Where a functioning chimney is in place for intended use by an incoming tenant it will be swept prior to occupation.

## **16.0 Cleaning**

16.1 The property will be clean and any rubbish and unwanted items left by the previous tenant will be removed.

## **17.0 External Condition**

17.1 One and two storey properties will have the rainwater gutters cleared of any debris.

17.2 Chimneys where left, external brickwork, pointing, rendering and cladding will be checked for defects that could result in water penetration.

17.3 Front and rear paths will be safe without trip hazards.

17.4 Entrance gates and front fencing (where provided) will be sound and secure.

## **18.0 Quality Control**

18.1 If the property that you have been offered does not meet this standard please let us know as soon as possible.

## Annex B

### Decoration Packs

Decoration Pack - 1 Bedroom Property			
Colour	Type	Qty	Unit
Brilliant White	Vinyl Matt	1	5 ltr
Magnolia	Vinyl Matt	2	5 ltr
White	Gloss	1	2.5 ltr
White	Undercoat	1	2.5 lt
Brush Cleaner	-	1	1 ltr
Brush	25mm	1	item
Brush	50mm	1	item
Roller + Tray	Plastic	1	item
Sandpaper	Sheets	1	Pack 5
Filler	Pack	1	Pack
Filling knife	50mm	1	item

Decoration Pack - 2 Bedroom Property			
Colour	Type	Qty	Unit
Brilliant White	Vinyl Matt	1	5 ltr
Magnolia	Vinyl Matt	2	5 ltr
White	Gloss	1	2.5 ltr
White	Undercoat	1	2.5 lt
Brush Cleaner	-	1	1 ltr
Brush	25mm	1	item
Brush	50mm	1	item
Roller + Tray	Plastic	2	item
Sandpaper	Sheets	1	Pack 5
Filler	Pack	1	Pack
Filling knife	50mm	1	item

<b>Decoration Pack - 3 Bedroom Property</b>			
<b>Colour</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Qty</b>	<b>Unit</b>
Brilliant White	Vinyl Matt	1	5 ltr
Magnolia	Vinyl Matt	3	5 ltr
White	Gloss	1	2.5 ltr
White	Undercoat	1	2.5 lt
Brush Cleaner	-	1	1 ltr
Brush	25mm	1	item
Brush	50mm	1	item
Roller + Tray	Plastic	1	item
Sandpaper	Sheets	1	Pack 5
Filler	Pack	1	Pack
Filling knife	50mm	1	item

<b>Decoration Pack - 4 Bedroom Property</b>			
<b>Colour</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Qty</b>	<b>Unit</b>
Brilliant White	Vinyl Matt	1	5 ltr
Magnolia	Vinyl Matt	3	5 ltr
White	Gloss	1	2.5 ltr
White	Undercoat	2	2.5 lt
Brush Cleaner	-	1	1 ltr
Brush	25mm	1	item
Brush	50mm	1	item
Roller + Tray	Plastic	1	item
Sandpaper	Sheets	1	Pack 5
Filler	Pack	1	Pack
Filling knife	50mm	1	item