

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY – SHELTERED HOMES DECORATION

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ray Stanley

Responsible Officer: Head of Housing and Property – Nick Sanderson

Reason for Report: To advise members of the revised Void Management Policy.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That the Cabinet adopts the revised Void Management Policy

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Void Management Policy will be key to maintaining the councils stock within the parameters of the Decent Homes Standard.

Financial Implications: The financial implications will be contained within the Housing Revenue Account. It is important to prioritise financial management of the HRA to ensure the all available funds are used to the best effect.

Legal Implications: It will be necessary to ensure that the Void Management Policy addresses all the legal obligations the Council has as a Landlord for the housing estate.

Risk Assessment: The management of 3060 homes for some of our most vulnerable tenants contains many risks. These risks are managed at a service level.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 654 of the properties owned by the Housing Revenue Account were formally classified as 'Sheltered Accommodation' however this has since been reclassified as 'Accessible Housing'.
- 1.2 The change in designation has removed the minimum age criteria for allocation of these properties. It is possible that in the future in order to make the best use of the housing stock these properties may be allocated to persons under the age of 45, in recent months one of these properties was let to a 29 year old.
- 1.3 In the majority cases persons in their 50's and 60's are normally capable of carrying out internal decoration.
- 1.4 Throughout 2015/16 works were carried out to 227 void properties, 71 of these where designated as 'sheltered housing stock'.
- 1.5 Based upon our schedule of rates a total of £261,205 has been spent bringing 'sheltered housing stock' up to an acceptable standard in 2015/16, an average of £3,679 per property. It is estimated that of this £48,340 relates to decoration of the properties.

2.0 **Tenant Consultation**

- 2.1 The Housing 'Tenants Together' group have been consulted on this policy and their comments taken into consideration.
- 2.2 The 'Tenants Together' working party covered this topic in their previous 'Voids Review' and is very supportive of the recommendations.

Many of those on the Tenants Together group live in our sheltered stock and as such have first-hand experience of the topic. They felt that it was not unreasonable for the Council to expect a new tenant to decorate their new home, and in fact they felt that historically in most cases new tenants redecorate shortly after moving in whether we decorated or not.

3.0 **Proposals**

- 3.1 In order to reduce costs and counteract the constraints placed upon the Housing Revenue Account by the current financial climate, it is proposed that we no longer decorate sheltered /accessible housing stock, and apply the same principles to decoration as currently used for our general needs stock.

4.0 **Implementation of the Void Management Policy**

- 4.1 Other than the change to the decoration of 'sheltered housing stock' the original Void Management Policy remains the same to ensure that our void properties are let as soon as possible and to a reasonable standard.
- 4.2 There are no additional resource implications as a direct result of this policy.

5.0 **Financial Context**

- 5.1 Maintaining the Councils housing stock, including void properties, is the largest ongoing element of the Councils capital programme.
- 5.2 Within the annual budget there are sufficient monies to fund the current level of voids received each year.
- 5.3 It is envisaged that these changes to the way in which we currently work could reduce our void costs by approximately £176,980 over the next 4 years.
- 5.4 The physical decoration of 'sheltered housing stock' will be replaced with a decoration pack costing £60 and £65, dependent upon the property size.
 - 5.4.1 There were 68 sheltered properties decorated in 2015/16, of these 50 were 1 bedroom and 18 were two bedroom.
 - 5.4.2 The average cost to decorate a 1 bedroom sheltered property based upon our schedule of rates was £683, and the average price to decorate a 2 bedroom sheltered property was £787.
 - 5.4.3 The total cost to decorate sheltered voids throughout 2015/16 was £48,340

- 5.4.4 It is envisaged, should this proposal be accepted, that we would only need to decorate approximately 5% of the sheltered voids going forward, this would be due to being handed back in exceptionally poor condition or nicotine stained
- 5.4.5 It is envisaged that a saving of approximately £44,245 per year based on 95% of 2015/16 figures, could be made by no longer decorating sheltered properties.

Size	Number	Average Decoration Cost	Total	Decoration Pack Cost	Total	Saving
1 Bed	49	£683	£33,467	£60	£2,940	£30,527
2 Bed	19	£787	£14,953	£65	£1,235	£13,718

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Circulation of the Report: Management Team, Councillor Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing

Mid Devon District Council

Building Services

Void Management Policy – DRAFT

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Policy Statement

This policy is to ensure that Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) has effective procedures in place to manage its empty stock quickly and efficiently.

As the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 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.

The policy will ensure a forward looking and strategic approach to void management that will help to:

- Minimise rent loss through reducing the length of the void period and repair costs
- Set out MDDC's Housing Service Standard 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
- Set in place systems for monitoring the standards of void properties and customer satisfaction with their new home

The policy, together with MDDC's Housing Service Tenancy Management and Repair policies will guide staff in ensuring that tenants are aware of their repair responsibilities and end of tenancy obligations.

It should be used in conjunction with the most recent housing needs survey and the allocations policy, to ensure that the stock is well used in a way that meets local demand in a fair and equitable way.

This policy will be reviewed on a bi-annual basis to ensure that its contents reflect current legislation and the latest examples of best practice in the field.

Ending tenancies

All tenants are required to give four weeks written notice terminating their tenancy which is effective from the Monday after the termination notice is received.

Tenancies always finish on a Sunday and keys must be returned to Mid Devon District Council by the time stated in the tenancy agreement.

Failure to return the keys by the time stated in the tenancy agreement will incur a charge as stated in the tenancy agreement. Where the keys are not returned at all, the cost of changing locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant.

As part of the end of tenancy process the tenant will allow MDDC to carry out a pre-void inspection if requested.

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, all outgoing tenants will be reminded of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy. The Council will then arrange inspection of the property before the tenant moves out. This will enable the Housing Service to:-

- Agree any improvements which are eligible for compensation
- Identify any rechargeable repairs
- Identify and notify maintenance contractors of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning
- Identify any factors which will be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, such as special adaptations

The outgoing tenant will be responsible for the full costs for clearing out the property and any other rechargeable repairs identified.

Any rechargeable repairs will be identified where possible during the pre-void inspection and the tenant made aware of their responsibilities regarding these. 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. The Council reserve the right to recharge the outgoing tenant for any rechargeable works that occurred after or that were not visible during, the pre-void inspection.

The tenant will also be informed by their Neighbourhood team about the status of their rent account and any sub accounts and required to make payments to clear any outstanding debt before the end of the tenancy. If the tenant is in arrears but is unable to clear them in full before the end of the tenancy, they will be required to make an affordable payment agreement to clear the debt. Failure to do so will mean that the tenant will be pursued for any monies owing through the courts. The outgoing tenant will be required to provide a forwarding address, as specified in their tenancy agreement.

Where it is suspected a property is abandoned the statutory procedures will be followed as detailed in our tenancy management procedures.

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 our own allocations policies.

Vacating Tenants

The vacating tenants are required to fulfil the following conditions when they wish to end their tenancy:

General Conditions:

- Provide a minimum of four weeks' notice of intention to move out
- Allow staff access to pre-inspect the property following an appointment

- Allow staff to show prospective tenants to view the property before it becomes void
- Have a clear rent account
- Return all the keys to the property as stated in the tenancy agreement
- Have all utility meters read before moving out. If key meters are fitted, leave the keys in the meters with no debts
- Provide a forwarding address
- Allow access to carryout minor repairs before you vacate the property

Cleaning and Clearing:

- Make sure that the garden is tidy and free of rubbish
- Remove all furniture, belongings and any rubbish from the property - including the loft, the garden, and sheds
- Leave the property in a clean condition – windows, floors, cupboards, worktops and all sanitary ware

Decorations / Fixtures and fittings:

- Make sure the property is in good decorative order
- Repair any damage caused by moving fittings and fixtures
- Repair everything that has been damaged
- Agree with staff and clearly mark any items they wish to leave behind for the next incoming tenant
- Overpaint any bold and bright wall or ceiling colours with an obliterating emulsion

Pre-Void Inspection

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 both the Housing Options team and the Adaptations Officer, so that they are able to offer the property to an appropriate prospective tenant.

The outgoing tenant should put any queries regarding rechargeable repairs raised at the time of the pre-void inspection to the Building Services Manager via the complaints procedure.

Void Inspection

As soon as the property becomes void it will be re-inspected to confirm if the former tenant has:-

- Complied with all their end of tenancy obligations

It will also enable the inspecting officer to identify any repairs that may have been missed or hidden by furniture etc during the pre-void inspection that need to be recharged.

Repairs to Void Properties

The Council aims to identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible.

All works undertaken in the property will be completed to the Void Standard (Appendix A), which has been agreed with our tenants, and to the Decent Homes Standard as laid out by the Government.

All properties will be issued with electrical and gas safety certificates in compliance with legal requirements.

To speed re-let times, repairs will be classified into two categories:-

1. Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty (including safety checks)
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.

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.

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.

Every attempt will be made to complete all repairs prior to the new tenant taking up their tenancy; however, in some circumstances minor, 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.

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 are given to the new tenant as part of the sign up process.

Internal Decoration

The Council do not decorate properties before being let. It is the responsibility of the incoming tenant to decorate as they see fit.

Where the vacating tenant 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 Council will provide a 'Paint Pack' (Appendix 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 of the property.

Building Sustainable Neighbourhoods

All prospective tenants are provided with information about the property attributes, and local neighbourhood facilities prior to viewing.

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.

All new tenants are given 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 6 weeks of their tenancy commencing. In summary the purpose of this visit will be:-

- To welcome the tenant and give an opportunity for them to ask any questions, raise any concerns, follow up on any outstanding issues etc;
- To establish if they need any extra help setting up their home and Identify any support needs the tenant may have;
- To offer any advice about benefit that the tenant may be entitled to;
- To discuss rent payment options or delays with outstanding Housing Benefit payments
- To reinforce the terms of the tenancy agreement and the tenants' rights and responsibilities.

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.

Diversity Issues

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.

Monitoring and Customer Involvement

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.

Appendix A

Our Standard of Repair for Empty Properties

We aim to provide a high quality repairs service to all our tenants and we rely on your comments and suggestions to help us improve.

We want our new tenants to move into properties that are safe and secure, clean and in good condition.

All our empty properties will meet our statutory and contractual obligations and the government's Decent Homes Standard.

Generally:

Our properties will have:

- Clean, hygienic facilities for preparing food
- Sanitary ware that is clean, functioning and hygienic
- An efficient heating system that is safe and easy to use
- Good thermal insulation
- Modern UPVC double glazed windows
- A mains-powered smoke alarm
- A mains-powered carbon monoxide alarm (if property has gas or solid fuel heating)

Decoration:

You are responsible for all internal decorations.

Safety:

When you sign your tenancy agreement you will receive the following documents relating to your new home:

- Electrical test certificate
- Gas appliance safety certificate (if the property has a gas supply)
- Solid fuel appliance safety certificate (if fitted)

Gardens:

- If the property has a garden, all debris will be removed and grass will be 'rough cut'
- Fencing (if provided) will mark the boundaries of the property

Doors:

- External doors to the property will be secure with at least 2 sets of keys
- Security chains will be fitted to the front and rear doors

- All doors in the property will open and close easily

Internal Woodwork:

- All internal woodwork will be free from serious damage or decay
- All new woodwork will be primed ready for painting

Windows and Glazing:

- Windows that are designed to open and close will do so
- All glazing will be intact

Floors and Stairs:

- All solid floors and floor tiling will be free of cracks or other faults that may cause injury
- All floorboards will be sound and secured. (We cannot guarantee that floorboards will not have some slight movement or creaking)
- All parts of staircases will be secure and free from defects

Kitchen:

- 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
- All kitchen units will be clean and in good condition
- Worktops will be clean and hygienic
- The kitchen sink top will be clean and in good condition
- 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)

Bathroom and Toilet:

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

Mains Service:

- The property will have an electricity supply that has been tested prior to letting and is safe
- If the property has a gas supply, all fitted appliances will have been tested for safety prior to letting

- 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)

Heating and Hot Water:

The property will have space and water heating that is safe and ready to use. We will give you a manual on how to use the heating system when you sign your tenancy agreement.

- All gas appliances (where fitted) will be safe and serviced within the last 12 months
- Any solid fuel appliances (where fitted) will be safe and serviced in the last 12 months
- All electric storage heaters (where fitted) will be tested and be safe

Energy Efficiency:

- All light fittings will have low energy light bulbs fitted
- Loft spaces will be insulated to current standards

Cleaning:

- The property will be clean and any rubbish and unwanted items left by the previous tenant will be removed
- If the property has a working chimney, it will be swept

External Condition:

- One and two storey properties will have the rainwater gutters cleared of any debris
- Chimneys, external brickwork, pointing, rendering and cladding will be checked for defects that could result in water penetration
- Front and rear paths will be safe without trip hazards
- Entrance gates and front fencing (where provided) will be sound and secure

Quality Control:

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

Appendix B

Decoration Pack

Decoration Pack - 1 Bedroom Property

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	1	item
Sandpaper	Sheets	1	Pack 5
Filler	Pack	1	Pack
Filling knife	50mm	1	item

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

Decoration Pack - 3 Bedroom Property			
Colour	Type	Qty	Unit
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

Decoration Pack - 4 Bedroom Property			
Colour	Type	Qty	Unit
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
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Filling knife	50mm	1	item
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