



# RCH Policy: Void Management

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This policy can be made available, in other languages, on request and in other formats such as large print, audio format and braille as required.

## 1. Scope

This is a River Clyde Homes (RCH) policy and therefore applies to Staff, Board and Committee members of River Clyde Homes.

This policy describes the activities and responsibilities involved in the reletting of existing RCH properties. The Void Management Policy applies to all social rented property owned or managed by the RCH Group.

## 2. Introduction

The Void Management Policy aims to ensure that River Clyde Homes (RCH):

- allocates all vacant (void) properties quickly
- delivers a consistent quality of accommodation
- keep void properties in a safe and well-kept condition for the protection of tenants, the property and general appearance
- defines when properties will be classified as unlettable or deactivated
- minimises rent loss as a result of properties being empty
- delivers an excellent customer experience

Every property that we allocate should be let in accordance with our Housing Allocation Policy and should meet our Lettable Standard. (**Appendix 1**).

The following is a summary of the legislation and regulations that impact the Void Management Policy.

- The Buildings Energy Performance Directive (January 2003)
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 2013
- Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The Equality Act 2010
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2006
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2014
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003
- HSG 65 – The Plan, Do, Check, Act Cycle
- Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)
- Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH)

- Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC)

The Void Management Policy should also be read in conjunction with the following policies, strategies and procedures:

- Allocation Policy
- Estate Management Policy
- Unlettable and Deactivated Properties Policy
- Maintenance and Rechargeable Repairs Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Mould and Dampness Policy
- Legionella Policy
- Asbestos Policy
- Electrical Safety Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Gas Safety Policy
- Customer Services Strategy
- Value for Money Strategy
- Void Management Procedure

### **3. Definitions**

This policy complies with the guidelines set by The Scottish Government in the Social Housing Charter (SSHC). The Scottish Housing Regulator has identified a number of key indicators relevant to void management by which it will measure landlord performance, including the following:

- Quality of housing – tenants’ homes as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), and any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat Standard.
- Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes – tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.
- Value for Money – tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

### **4. Policy Statement and Responsibilities**

RCH will allocate all vacant (void) properties quickly, deliver a consistent quality of accommodation in line with our published Lettable Standard, minimise rent loss from empty properties and deliver an excellent customer experience.

## **Responsibilities**

The Customer Services Director has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Void Management Policy.

The Head of Housing Services, Housing Services Manager and Area Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring Housing Officers and Assistant Housing Officers implement the tenancy and letting elements of the policy. This includes pre-termination inspections, ending the tenancy, the allocation process and the settling-in visits.

The Voids Area Team Leader is responsible for ensuring that all void management related duties are carried out as per the Void Management Policy and processes. In addition, they will oversee the performance of contractors including Home Fix Scotland (HFS) in the delivery of voids.

Home Fix Scotland (HFS) and other contractors have responsibility for the implementation of the void repair elements of the policy. With regards to the void repairs undertaken by HFS, the Business Operations Manager (HFS) is responsible for managing the elements of the repairs, safety checks, repairing the property to the Lettable Standard and post inspections. The Business Operations Manager (HFS) is also responsible for monitoring the performance of all subcontractors used in the undertaking of void work. In the event of another contractor undertaking void works for RCH a similar role will be required.

## **Drivers of Success**

Key drivers to the successful delivery of this policy include:

- Excellent communication between Customer Services and HFS.
- Adherence to process and delivery targets at every phase of the void workflow.
- High-quality repair work.
- Maintaining customer focus throughout the whole void workflow.

## **Void Classification Rationale**

Demand Properties	3 or more bids expressed through Choice Based Letting (CBL) and only require to be advertised once
Lettable Properties	3 bids expressed through Choice Based Letting (CBL) however we may require to advertise it more than once

Low Demand Properties	less than 3 bids and/or properties where we have 3 or more refusals for non-personal reasons and/or; properties within a letting area with a higher than normal rate of turnover
Unlettable Properties - are properties that are not in a position to be let. If repairs are made, they would be in a position to be let.	fire/flood damage, major repair and/or refurbishment/modernisation works, properties held for decanting or the property has no demand. The Social Landlord and Operations Committee will receive quarterly updates on current unlettable properties (Reference should be made to RCH Group Policy for Unlettable & Deactivated Properties)
Deactivated Properties - are properties that RCH Group has decided will be demolished. They are not habitable and will not become habitable.	The Social Landlord and Operations Committee has approved the property for disposal (sale or demolition) (Reference should be made to RCH Group Policy for Unlettable & Deactivated Properties)

RCH Group Policy for Unlettable & Deactivated Properties is a separate policy that aims to ensure that all properties which fall into these categories are safe and secure, and we will do this by having an inspection and risk assessment process in place.

## 5. Void Management Processes and Procedures

The processes that we adopt are set out in full detail in our Void Management Procedures and summarised below.

### **Pre-termination Arrangements**

Tenants are legally required to give us 28-days' notice that they are intending to end their tenancy. Our void management process commences as soon as we get notice of a vacant property and receive a written tenancy termination. Once notice has been received, a Tenant Responsibilities letter will be issued which outlines what responsibilities the tenant has during the void process.

At that point we will arrange to carry out a pre-termination inspection of the property within 10 working days of receipt of notice. The pre-termination inspection allows us to inspect the condition of the property as well as provide advice to the outgoing tenant. This will include confirming when keys are to be handed in, requirements in relation to housing clearance, arrangements for meter readings, identification of any outstanding rent and any rechargeable repairs. The pre-termination inspection will be carried out by a Housing Officer and the findings of the inspection will be recorded

on the Pre-Termination Home Visit Survey Form. More detailed information on how to carry out the pre-termination inspection, including a copy of the pre-termination inspection checklist can be found in the associated Void Property Procedure document.

We expect outgoing tenants to leave their property cleared, cleaned and in good condition and also to provide us with forwarding address so that we can follow up any queries. During the notice period where practical we will endeavour to carry out repairs subject to access.

There will be circumstances where we do not receive notice and where it is not possible to carry out a pre-termination visit, such as where the tenant has died, where a property has been abandoned by the former tenant or where the former tenant has been evicted. In these cases, our aim will be to have keys returned or have locks changed as quickly as practically possible so that the property can be relet without undue delay.

### **End of Tenancy – Post-Termination Inspection**

Once a tenancy has been ended, tenancy and property records will be updated, and the void property will be jointly inspected by the Void Property Inspector and Housing Officer/Assistant Housing Officer where practical. All necessary repairs will be instructed, rechargeable repairs identified, inventory and photographs taken. Where it is not practical to carry out a joint void inspection, the Housing Officer/Assistant Housing Officer will carry out a separate inspection to take an inventory and photographs, review standard of decoration and condition of any items left in the property.

Prior to the post-termination inspection, the Property Inspector will review the Pre-termination Inspection form that has been completed by the Housing Officer.

### **Void Repairs**

All of our empty properties will be inspected to assess their condition, suitability for reletting and instruct repairs.

On occasions, an options appraisal may require to be carried when we encounter a large-scale property cost and whether it's financially viable to undertake the voids for letting.

Our properties will be wind and watertight, safe and secure, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH). However, due to technical, legal or financial reasons, there may be a small number of occasions when we are not able to meet ESSH.

Appendix 1 sets out the Lettable Standard repair works that supplement the SHQS

where appropriate to ensure a property is ready for let. Link to SHQS for information. **SHQS+Technical+Guidance+for+Social+Landlords-** .

Planned programme renewals will generally be carried out when the property is occupied to coincide with the approved investment timetable in accordance with RCH's planned maintenance programme. However, in certain circumstance it may be more expedient to carry out planned programme renewals when a property is void – there is discretion to do so where it is financially viable.

Where items have been left by the outgoing tenant, the property is not found to be in a reasonable state of cleanliness and there is deliberate damage then the outgoing tenant will be recharged for clearing/cleaning the property and making good the damage.

The HFS Void team or other RCH approved contractor carrying out the void repairs will provide updates on the progress of works at weekly voids meeting. Any H&S related matters that arise must be notified to the RCH Void Team Lead at the time that the incident occurs, and the Incident/Accident/Near Miss form should be completed by the RCH Void Team Lead.

### **Post-Work Inspections**

Post inspection of all void property works will be carried out by Home Fix Scotland (HFS) or another RCH approved contractor and then passed to the RCH Void Team who will carry out a further inspection before passing to the Housing Team for let.

If there are 3 or more issues identified at the post inspection, the post inspection will cease, and the void will be returned to HFS or another contractor to address outstanding repairs/issues.

It is the Property Inspector's responsibility to ensure that the Lettable Standard has been met and to return keys to the HO.

### **Selection and Allocation**

We will commence the allocation process as soon as we have formal notification of a void property. The selection of potential tenants and allocation of properties will be carried out strictly in accordance with our Housing Allocation Policy.

Where possible we will pre-allocate void properties. Where we have identified an interested applicant, we will notify them by phone as soon as keys are available for viewing. In all cases the viewing will be carried out accompanied by the local RCH Housing Officer and Community Caretakers in multi-storey blocks. However, there is also discretion for us to carry out viewings prior to the previous tenancy ending.

Where an offer of tenancy is accepted, a Tenancy Agreement will be signed. As well as the date of entry, this includes details of tenant and landlord responsibilities. We



will provide tenancy advice for new tenants and seek to answer queries at the point of tenancy sign up.

Every new tenant will receive a settling-in visit that will be carried out normally within 30 working days of the tenancy start date.

### **Performance Management Framework**

We will operate Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure the outcome of the void policy and also to track void workflow process efficiency. Annual targets will be set through the service planning process. Targets and measures will be reviewed annually.

We set processing targets for each step (sub-process) in our void workflow. The sub-processes in italics are measured and reported (through the ARC) to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). The individual sub-processes are outlined within our void procedures (see below).

<b>Void Sub Process</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
Notification to Key Returned – pretermination & advertising	20 working days	Housing Officer/ Assistant Housing Officer
Void Inspection	5 working days from when property cleared	Void Property Inspector & Housing Officer/Assistant Housing Officer where practical
Void Property Repairs	Essential Works – 5 working days  Standard Voids – 20 working days  Major voids (based on type of works) – 40 working days  (Note: exemptions apply for major works as per SHR guidance)	HFS
Post Inspection	1 working day	Void Property Inspector
Allocation & Sign on	5 working days	Housing Officer/Assistant Housing Officer where practical
Settling In Visit	30 working days	Housing Officer/Assistant Housing Officer where practical

## **Governance**

The Social Landlord and Operations Committee and the HFS Board will receive regular updates on void management performance.

RCH will comply with all Scottish Housing Regulator requirements and, in particular, adhere to the Notifiable Events Guidance in relation to this policy.

## **Risks**

The key high-level risks to the achieving the delivery of the Void Management Policy objectives are:

- Increase in low demand properties leading to longer relet times and increased disposals.
- Inefficient completion of repairs processes and lead in times for materials resulting in longer relet times increased costs, council tax levy and refusal by customers.
- Inconsistent application of the relet standard leading to rejection of property by customers or potential future damages payable by RCH for letting property that falls below that tolerable standard.
- Poor communication between Housing Officers, Void Property Inspectors, HFS and RCH customers leading to longer relet times and customer dissatisfaction.
- Failure of RCH to allocate properties timeously

If on arrival at the property a health and safety risk is identified e.g. unauthorised access or damage that would make it unsafe to complete the inspection, then the Property Inspector will withdraw, instruct the necessary make safe works and details of the condition of the property will be provided to the contractor. Relevant signage will be erected where appropriate to do so. An Incident/Accident/Near Miss Form must be completed and sent to Health and Safety with follow up actions recorded. (Refer to Risk Assessment – Inspecting Void Properties).

In order to manage these risks, a risk assessment has been developed that will address the health and safety risks associated with working in void properties for both RCH staff and external contractors. The risk assessment will cover, as a minimum:

- Structural Hazards e.g. damaged floors, ceilings and walls
- Environmental hazards such as damp and mould or accumulation of waste
- Security risks such as unauthorised access to the premises, theft or vandalism, lone working

- Biological hazards such as presence of pests or vermin or the presence of blood, body fluids and sharps
- Slips, trips and falls
- Manual handling injuries
- Accidents and incidents

This risk assessment will be developed with input from staff members that will be working in void properties. The risk assessment will be circulated to all RCH staff that carry out work in void premises and will be provided to contractors prior to works in void premises.

The risk assessment will be reviewed and updated annually or after any significant changes to the property or work processes or incident relating to void properties.

### **Contractor Management**

Where external contractors are used to carry out works on void properties, the following control measures will be implemented:

1. Contractors used will be subject to RCH contractor selection processes and procedures.
2. Contractors will be provided with RCH's void property risk assessment and relevant information from the pre-termination inspection. However, contractors must also submit their own risk assessments to be reviewed by RCH.
3. Contractors will be provided with a clear scope of works for each individual void property outlining what works are required and the timeline for completion of works.
4. Clear lines of communication will be established between contractors and the organisation. This will include regular timescales for check ins on progress of works and to ensure that any incidents have been reported to the organisation.

## **6. Low Demand & Hard to Let Properties**

The priority for RCH is always to avoid any of its properties becoming unattractive to potential customers. However, it is recognised that there are a number of factors that may contribute to a property becoming hard-to-let and/or low demand that are outwith its control.

The Association will monitor stock turnover, refusal rates and waiting list demand to identify potential difficulties in letting any individual property or allocating within an area. Where a property or an area does become hard to let or in low demand, RCH will

consider appropriate initiatives to ensure void periods are minimised in the short term and in the longer terms, strategies to address hard-to-let areas.

Initiatives and strategies will include:

- Marketing of properties
- Offering incentives
- Local letting plans
- Intensive estate management
- Collaboration with partners

## **7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken and no negative impact on equality was identified.

RCH will apply this policy fairly and consistently. In implementing this policy, we will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, or any other grounds. Our commitment to equality and fairness will apply irrespective of factors such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or other personal attributes.

## **8. Review**

This policy will be reviewed in its entirety every 3 years, unless an earlier review is required due to changes in legal, regulatory or best practice requirements, or because monitoring and reporting reveals that a change in policy is required sooner.

## **Appendix 1 Void Property Lettable Standard as per SHQS Requirements when practical to do so**

### **General Standard**

- The property will be wind and watertight, free from damp and mould, and safe and secure
- An asbestos survey will be undertaken if required
- Asbestos removals/repairs/encapsulations/labelling will be completed as per the survey report recommendations and void scope of works
- Communal aerial points, where fitted, will be confirmed to incoming tenant
- All properties will be let with a fully operational heating system (gas, electric, biomass or heat recovery)
- Stop taps and/or sure stop switches will be clearly located and labelled within the home and tested to ensure they are in working order
- Where applicable, 1 cellar and laundry key to be provided
- Where applicable, 2 door entry system keys/fobs to be provided
- All properties will be provided with waste bins/refuse areas and confirmed with tenant
- Any vermin and insect infestation will be treated
- The property will be treated for any dampness or timber infestation if required
- All properties will receive a deep clean once void works are complete before being passed back to housing
- Controlled entry handsets will be tested and in working order
- House ventilation systems in properties will be fully operational and cleaned
- Effective ventilation will be checked in bathroom and kitchens, to ensure units are in working order and clean. Ventilation will be installed/renewed as required
- Close cleaning should be carried out and frequency will depend on the number of flats in the block versus number of void properties

### **Certification**

**No property should be let without the following certification:**

- EICR (electrical installation condition report)
- EPC (energy performance certificate)
- CP12 (Gas safety certificate – if applicable)

### **Electric**

- All electrics must be checked and a certificate of inspection issued to the new tenant
- Alterations carried out to the electric system by the previous tenant will be removed unless covered by the compliance certificate
- All pendants to be fitted with energy saving lightbulbs and all discoloured light fittings are to be replaced
- Extractor fans will be tested and in working order and will be installed in kitchen + bathroom where possible

### **Gas**

- All void properties with gas will be capped at void stage unless only essential safety checks/works are required
- Demand, lettable and any Unlettable voids being brought back into the letting pool will have an appropriate gas safety checks carried out prior to hand back
- If gas is due to be serviced within two months of the date on CP12, a new service should be carried out prior to sign on
- All focal fires will be removed, bricked and vented
- If the boiler fails the check, necessary works should be instructed and the appliance re-tested
- Gas appliances will be removed and disposed of in all cases

### **Detectors**

- All smoke/heat and CO detectors must be in place or installed in accordance with the revised Scottish Housing Quality Standard and include:
  - At least one smoke alarm installed in the room most frequently used
  - At least one smoke alarm in spaces such as hallways and landings
  - At least one heat alarm in every kitchen
  - Smoke and heat alarms will be interlinked
  - Carbon monoxide detector will be required in all homes
- Hardwired or battery smoke alarms will be tested and in working order and incoming tenants to be advised of their responsibility to replace batteries

### **Water Supply**

- Legionella risk assessment will be undertaken in every void property
- Legionella remedials will be completed as per the legionella risk assessment recommendations

Between October and April or during severe cold spells, we will consider whether the water system will be drained down

### **Windows**

- All windows and associated safety mechanisms will be checked and be fully operational
- All windows will be fitted with locks or effective safety catches
- All cracked and broken glass will be replaced. Glass will not be replaced for minor scratches

### **Doors**

- External locks to be changed as standard and new tenant to be provided with a minimum of 2 sets of keys with the exception of sheltered complexes or suited locks
- A minimum of 2 key fobs or 2 keys will be provided for any controlled door entry system (Additional can be purchased at a cost to the tenant)
- All pass doors should be intact, non-glazed and operating properly
- All bathroom doors will have an operational locking system
- All doors not meeting safety standards will be removed and replaced
- Internal fire doors will be fitted where required
- Door stops will be fitted where required
- Front, back and veranda doors will be secure, wind and watertight and in good working order
- Front door will have letterbox fitted

### **Floors/Stairs**

- Laminate flooring will only be left if in good condition--All loose or missing floorboards will be re-secured or replaced
- Squeaky floorboards will be tightened where possible
- Skirting and facings will be renewed if missing or badly damaged
- Damaged floor tiles will be removed
- Ceramic tiles will be renewed
- Staircase handrails and balustrades will be checked and secured if necessary
- Stair treads and risers to be checked and repaired if necessary

### **Walls/Ceilings**

- Any polystyrene tiles and coving will be removed
- Where plaster surfaces are in a poor condition, these will be repaired as necessary

### **Décor**

- All internal and external areas should be free from graffiti or vandalism. Graffiti should be adequately covered with appropriate stain-block. Any offensive or badly damaged/stained decoration will be removed
- RCH is generally not responsible for the condition/level of decoration in a property. However, where the void officer is in discussion with housing officer feels the standard of decoration may affect the ability to let the property, decoration should be considered. This could be carried out at void stage or new tenant could be offered a decoration pack
- Paint colours within the void should be limited to white emulsion (with exception of magnolia if dark colours have been used) on the walls and ceiling. Skirting and facings should be white gloss

### **Kitchen**

- The kitchen will meet the Scottish Quality Housing Standard (SQHS) when possible to do so. As a minimum, the kitchen will comprise of a sink unit, base unit, wall unit and with worktop
- All kitchen units to be checked and hinges replaced/adjusted where necessary. Drawers and doors will open freely and close properly and all fittings will be secure. Damaged doors/drawers will be repaired or replaced
- Damaged worktops will be repaired/replaced. Minor chips/scores to worktops will be left but worktops that are damaged as a result of burning/water ingress will be replaced
- Damaged tiling likely to cause leaks will be repaired or renewed
- Taps will be in working order and chains and plugs will be fitted
- Homes will have a suitable located electric and/or gas cooker point
- Where no communal facility is available, homes will have fittings for tenant to install a washing machine

### **Bathroom**

- The bathroom suite will be checked for chips/cracks and free from significant staining
- Ensure the integrity is intact for each bathroom component
- Taps will be in working order and chains and plugs will be fitted if missing
- A new toilet seat will be provided on a like for like basis
- All new properties will either have a bath and/or shower
- Showers and shower rails will be checked to ensure they are in full working order and a shower curtain will be supplied and fitted
- Shower head and hose will be replaced
- Any damaged tiles likely to cause water ingress will be replaced
- Some bathrooms have been designed to 'mobility standards'. This means they have grab rails and a low bath which may be shorter than a standard bath. We will not remove these features at void stage.



**Attic/Shed/Cellar/Outbuilding**

- Attic, shed, outbuilding and cellar will be cleared completely of all furniture, debris and safety hazards. Any items in good condition will be moved to storage for in-house recycling scheme
- Where sheds or outbuildings are in a poor state of repair, they will be removed

**Garden**

- Gardens, paths and stairways will be cleared of all debris and safety hazards
- Cut down rough grass areas to 50mm (longer term voids to be maintained during void period)
- Hedges to be trimmed to provide a neat and tidy appearance and should not exceed 5 feet in height
- All grass and hedge cuttings to be removed and disposed of appropriately
- All garden rubble to be removed from front and rear garden areas
- Carry out limited operations to trees located within garden boundary including but not limited to tidying, removal of dead, crowded or weak branches and thinning, removal of specific branches to increase light and reduce weight

**External**

- All properties will be free from leaking gutters and rainwater pipework
- RCH boundary fences to be repaired or reinstated

**Adaptations**

- All medical adaptations will be inspected to ensure they are fully operational
- Temporary adaptations will be removed where necessary
- Where non-standard adaptations are left, the new tenant is required to sign a disclaimer to accept the responsibility for future repair and maintenance
- Properties are allocated on the basis of permanent adaptations. These will generally not be removed unless damaged

**Items Left**

- Any items left in good condition will be removed and kept in storage for in-house recycling scheme
- Carpets, flooring and laminate can be left if they are in good condition, but this must be agreed with Housing Officer/Assistant Housing Officer prior to termination. For incoming tenant, a disclaimer must be signed stating they are willing to accept responsibility for ongoing management/replacement.