Void Management Policy

North Devon Homes

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This policy sets our approach to the management of residential void property owned by North Devon Homes (NDH).

2. Purpose

We aim to provide a safe, secure, and affordable home to the new and existing customers.

3. Scope

The policy covers the management of the void process from receiving notification of the existing tenancy ending, to the re-letting of the property to a new customer.

4. Principles

The following principles will apply to this policy:

- It will promote health and safe working practices whilst meeting our compliance obligations
- It will monitor performance of our voids systems and processes on an ongoing basis
- It will take all reasonable steps to ensure that properties meet or exceed our defined Letting standard
- It will deliver repairs and improvements in the most cost effective way using our internal contractor wherever possible
- It will seek to ensure value for money throughout the voids process
- It will undertake a pre-tenancy assessment for customers moving into a new home
- It will work with our partners to making best use of the property
- It will provide incoming customers with key information on the property and the local services available
- It will assess the long term viability of property upon notification that the property is becoming void
- It will use the opportunity that is presented at void to ensure up to date records of stock are maintained
- It will hold monthly reviews of performance with key staff

5. Review

We will review this policy and procedures every three years or following any relevant change to government policy, regulation or legislation.

This will ensure that it continues to be relevant and meeting reasonable customer expectation.

6. Application and Policy Statements

Responsibility for ensuring that this policy is communicated and implemented is with the Head of Housing Services. The different aspects of the void process are summarised in the table below:

Policy Statement	Section
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6.1 POLICY AREA:

“We will promote healthy and safe working practices whilst meeting compliance obligations”

Scope

We will aim to take reasonable steps to provide a safe working environment for all contractors working at a void property, and ensure the building has been tested to meet our safety requirements before the new customer(s) is given the keys to the building.

Application

The company will complete a written plan for the safe work for contractors working in the building, setting out roles and responsibilities, and how work is expected to be undertaken.

The risk assessment and plan will be completed before a contractor is allowed access to the property and will as a minimum meet the requirements of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations of 2015.

The programme of work will provide details of any relevant information for the contractors including the information that we might hold on the known location of any asbestos present in the building.

We will test all services present, to ensure they meet the relevant safety standards before the property is re-let. These services may include:

- gas appliances
- electrics including smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms
- The identification, and where necessary, testing and / or removal of any asbestos in the property
- solid fuel appliances and other heating systems
- fire doors in the property
- the assessment of risk of any potential Legionella

We will then provide the incoming customer(s) with copies of the safety certificates and appropriate information for the property.

6.2 POLICY AREA:

"We will monitor performance of our voids systems and processes on an ongoing basis"

Scope

We will measure our performance through tracking the rent loss of an empty home, the total cost of repairs and the satisfaction and feedback of customers moving into empty properties

Application

We will measure the following areas of performance:

- The loss of income whilst the property is vacant (this includes the loss of rent; service charges income and any discretionary non-chargeable periods)
- The total repairs costs of the void property broken down by individual trade, and/or contractor.
- The amount of time a property remains empty
- The satisfaction of customers moving into the property

We will identify properties held strategically void (for future disposal; re-development or decant purposes), and those properties being re-let as part of the normal voids process and provide separate measurement.

The lost income for each category of void will be recorded and be a key performance indicator provided to the Board on a quarterly basis.

The repair costs will be reviewed monthly by the Head of Neighborhoods along with the time taken to separately complete the repairs and lettings elements of the process.

6.3 POLICY AREA:

"We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that properties meet or exceed our defined Letting Standard"

Scope

We will assess the level of repair for each vacancy and incorporate improvement works where required. The Letting Standard will be available to provide incoming customer(s) with details of what they can expect as a minimum level of repair / service.

Application

A Voids Inspector will undertake a thorough inspection of the empty property to ensure the areas listed in the Lettings Standard are adhered to correctly.

All contractors (including internal contractors) will be made aware of the requirements of the Standard and the need to comply with it fully.

A Voids Inspector will normally undertake a post inspection to confirm that works have been undertaken as requested and to an appropriate standard
The incoming customer(s) will be provided with safety certification confirming compliance with these requirements and a copy of the post inspection report.

6.4 POLICY AREA:

"We will deliver repairs and improvements in the most cost effective way using our internal contractor wherever possible"

Scope

As part of the performance focus on overall void costs there will be presumption to offer void works to the in-house (H2H) maintenance team wherever possible.

Application

The use of our Home 2 Home in-house maintenance team both supports delivery of value for money and Corporate Strategy

External contractors will be employed for specialist trades and / or where H2H does not have the capacity to undertake the works within expected timescales.

Where Home 2 Home do not have the capacity to immediately undertake the works, the additional cost of out-sourcing the works will be weighed against the increased loss of income if the property remains vacant longer, to decide which is most cost effective option.

The Head of Neighborhoods will monitor the success of this on an ongoing and regular basis.

6.5 POLICY AREA:

"We will seek to ensure value for money throughout the voids process"

Scope

The time taken, the standard of workmanship and the cost incurred, to repair vacant homes (or undertake subsequent repairs within the next three months) will be monitored by the Voids Inspector to ensure expected time; standards and costs are met.

Application

Contractors will be expected to confirm when they start and complete works. This time will be measured and reviewed at regular contractor meetings and through monthly review meetings with key staff involved in the voids process including the Head of Housing Services.

The Voids Inspector will carry out a minimum of 80% post inspections to provide a quality assurance that the works have been completed to the standard expected.

We will assess, in conjunction with the new customer, whether any planned improvement works can be undertaken after they have moved into the property rather than when the property is void which would incur additional rent loss.

6.6 POLICY AREA:

"We will undertake a pre-tenancy assessment for customers moving into a new home"

Scope

We will undertake pre-tenancy assessments to all new customers and existing customers moving into a new home. This will identify any potential support needs, verify who is moving into the new home and identify whether there are any potential affordability issues.

Application

We will use a reputable credit agency and / or information available in the public domain to identify and / or verify:

- Any current or previous financial or debt issues;

- Any current or previous issues with anti-social behaviour (including convictions)
- The details of the household planning to move into the property
- Any potential support needs

If, during these checks and any subsequent pre-tenancy interview, further information or clarification is required we will provide a reasonable time-scale to provide this information. If this is not forthcoming or the information provided is insufficient we will not make the offer of accommodation.

The level of assessment will vary depending on the household circumstances. For example, an existing longstanding customer looking to move from older persons flat to another similar property is likely to require less assessment than someone of working age looking to be a first time tenant with NDH.

6.7 POLICY AREA:

"We will work with our partners to make best use of the property"

Scope

We will aim to find a suitable household that makes best use of the property in terms of capacity, bedroom size; any adaptations provided along with location of available support or employment, if required.

Application

We will normally look to allocate a property to a household that requires and can make full use of the number of bedrooms available in the vacant home. This is both to support the aims of the Local Authority, to meet expected standards and to support customers who may otherwise be impacted by the spare room subsidy.

Where appropriate we may exercise discretion. All instances of discretion will be reviewed by a senior manager and ordinarily will be reviewed by the Head of housing. Examples of where we may exercise discretion include:

- Where there is a Local Lettings Policy in place, that limits the number of children in a particular location
- Where is a local occupancy agreement in place and the number of persons meeting this criteria is limited (in such circumstances we may allow one additional bedroom beyond the needs of the household).

- Where the property has specific adaptations that limit the number of potential suitable applicants (in such circumstances we may allow one additional bedroom beyond the needs of the household).
- Where an existing tenant is looking to downsize from a large family house (3 bedrooms or more) we may consider offering them a 2 bed property if appropriate.
- If the property is needed for a temporary decant,
- The resulting vacancy is of strategic importance and / or will allow other customers in need to benefit

6.8 POLICY AREA:

“We will provide incoming customers with key information on the property and the local services available”

Scope

We want to support new customers to have a smooth transition into their new home by providing them with key information on the property and local services available.

Application

When the new customer collects the keys for their home we will provide them with a information pack which will include key information on their home and Neighbourhood. This will include where appropriate and available:

- Safety certificates for the electrics; gas and legionella where applicable
- Details and location of any known asbestos in the property
- An Energy Performance Certificate
- Operating details for the heating system installed in their home
- Details about rent payment; key tenancy conditions and how to apply for any consents required
- Refuse collection day in the area
- Key Local information (e.g. Location of local shop(s) or public transport)
- Information on location of stopcock, meters etc

6.9 POLICY AREA:

“We will assess the long term viability of property upon notification that the property is becoming void”

Scope

When notification that the property will becoming vacant is received, based on the Stock Appraisal principles agreed by the Board, we may decide to undertake an options appraisal prior to re-letting the property. This will normally be done when there is reason for concern about the location, suitability for our customers or repairs liability that a home may present.

Application

If the property meets some or all of the Stock Appraisal principles then we will undertake an assessment of its long term viability.

If the assessment recommends that the property is disposed of then a report will be taken to the Executive Team and then ultimately to the Board providing the supporting information and rationale for this recommendation.

Once the Executive Team has approved the recommendation to dispose of the property it will be classified as a Strategic Void and any rent loss incurred will be accounted for separately (as described under the Performance Focus section in this policy).

6.10 POLICY AREA:

“We will use the opportunity that is presented at void to ensure up to date records of stock are maintained”

Scope

We will use the voids inspection to verify if the existing stock information we hold on the property is up to date.

Application

We will carry out a stock condition survey on each void to ensure the asset management information we hold for individual property components is accurate.

We will also record any adaptations in the property which will remain and for which we will have a repairing obligation.

6.11 POLICY AREA:

"We will hold monthly reviews of performance with key staff"

Scope

Monthly reviews will be held to review performance and identify areas for improvement.

Application

We will undertake a monthly review of all properties let in the previous month, along with any properties remaining vacant, to identify any delays and the reasons behind this. In addition we will assess if there are any areas that could be improved in the future.

The meeting will include key managers involved in the voids process.

Any strategically held voids will not be part of these discussions.

7. Equality Impact Assessment form

7.1 Who has been consulted in developing the Policy?

Date	**Consultation methodology**	**Challenge / impact / result**
1.1.2017 to 20.2.2017	Key staff involved in the void process	
28.2.2017	Customer Forum meeting	

7.2 Identify potential impact on each of the diversity "groups"

Strand	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Comments / evidence
Race	√			
Disability	√			
Gender	√			
Gender Reassignment	√			
Sexual orientation	√			
Religion or belief	√			
Age	√			
Rural issues	√			
Social Inclusion issues	√			
Pregnancy and maternity	√			
Marriage and civil partnership	√			

Policy Review period **Next review date**	Three Years February 2019
Further reading and related policies relevant to this report:	
For further enquiries please contact:	Miles Sellick Head of Housing Services 01271 312507 miles.sellick@ndh-ltd.co.uk