



VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

Policy Classification: Management

Status: Approved

Policy Lead:	Director of Housing & Care Services
Date Approved:	August 2020
Last Review Date:	May 2012
Review Due Date:	August 2023
Review Period:	3 years unless required earlier due to changes in the law, regulation, best practice or requirement of the Association

REFERENCE PAGE

Document Title:	Void Management Policy
Aim:	To ensure we minimise rent losses by turning around empty properties quickly and efficiently, ensuring each property meets our minimum letting standard at the point of allocating the new tenancy.
Objective:	3 The Eildon Group will ensure the delivery of high quality, responsive and affordable housing and support services
Scope of Policy:	Customers
Nominated Officer:	Director of Housing and Care Services
Approval Source:	Executive Team
Legal and Regulatory References:	<p>This policy is based on the requirements of the following legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing (Scotland Act) 2001 • The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008 • The Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1994 • Equalities Act 2010
Procedural References:	<p>This policy has been considered alongside other Eildon policies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations Policy • Decant, Home Loss and Disturbance Policy • Tenancy Management Policy • Rent Management (Arrears) Policy • Estate Management Policy • Repairs and Maintenance Policy
Consultation Completed:	Yes - Staff & customers
Risk Implications:	1- Existing policy, minimal change

<p>Equalities Assessment:</p>	<p>All Eildon policies and key documents are developed with the clear objective of ensuring that they do not discriminate against any person and have negative impacts for equality groups. We will always welcome comments on the impact of a policy on particular groups of people in respect of, but not limited to, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation, being pregnant or on maternity leave and children's rights and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Accessibility:</p>	<p>Accessible electronically/online and in print. All documents can be translated and made available in audio, braille and large print versions upon request.</p>

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Purpose of policy	1
3. Definition of void properties.....	2
4. Inspections and rechargeable repairs	3
5. Targets and standards	4
6. Pre-allocations	4
7. Proactive action	5
8. Property standards.....	6
9. Redecoration allowances.....	6
10. Scale of payment.....	7
11. Additional measures	7
11.1 Environmental.....	7
11.2 Removals.....	7
11.3 Financial inclusion information	7
11.4 Security.....	8
12. Insurance	8
13. Monitoring.....	8
14. Complaints.....	9
15. Review.....	9
Appendix 1 – lettable standard	10

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A void property is any property where there is no person liable for rent during the period when the property is empty. Eildon aims to minimise void periods across our stock by having in place robust procedures to ensure we maximise our income and allocate void properties as quickly as possible, whilst ensuring how we allocate tenancies which contributes to stable communities.
- 1.2 This policy provides a framework for our approach to void management of Eildon's social rented properties, including our supported housing developments.
- 1.3 Separate arrangements are in place for Eildon's garages and for our non-social housing tenancies such as Mid-Market tenancies.
- 1.4 Occasionally properties become empty due to an emergency such as a fire or flood, or through arrangements with tenants to empty a property to enable us to carry out major repairs or development works. These arrangements are managed through our Decant, Home Loss and Disturbance Policy and as such are not covered within this Policy.

2. PURPOSE OF POLICY

- 2.1 The Void Management Policy aims to:
 - Minimise the loss of rental income arising from voids
 - Minimise the cost of repair works to void properties
 - Ensure that outgoing tenants are aware of their responsibilities prior to a termination date in order to keep repair costs to a minimum
 - Utilise Eildon's housing stock in a manner which satisfies housing demand amongst tenants and applicants and through our allocations policy makes for sustainable lets
 - Provide a proactive framework to enable staff to take positive action in the event of slower to let properties
 - Meet the Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcomes and Standards.

3. DEFINITION OF VOID PROPERTIES

3.1 Although the majority of our tenants terminate their tenancies in a planned way, there are various reasons why our properties become void. These are defined below:

- **Formal Termination** – The tenant is required to give 28-days written notice in terms of their tenancy agreement of their intention to leave the property. Their rent liability will continue if the keys are not handed in on time. There may be circumstances in which a tenant may not reasonably give 28-days' notice prior to vacating their property. These circumstances will be reviewed by the Housing Services Manager and a decision taken as to whether the tenant will be held liable for the rent for the full notice period.
- **Abandonment** – Where we issue a legal notice to a tenant who has vacated the property without notice. We will be mindful of households likely to abandon – those with rent arrears, those facing legal action, and first time tenants, vulnerable people, some of whom will be receiving housing support, where there has been a harassment or anti-social history.

We aim to identify abandonments quickly by a range of measures, including early action on arrears, regular estate inspections, post allocation visits etc. and by corporate working to ensure that any staff visiting at a development are alert to issues which may require to be followed up.

- **Death of Tenant** – Where we are notified of the death of a tenant and there is no successor, the tenancy legally ends with the death of the tenant. We will work sensitively with any family, next of kin or representative acting on behalf of the deceased tenant to end the tenancy in an effective way.

Keys should be returned as soon as possible after bereavement. No rent or service charge will be applied for the first week (7 days) after the tenancy ends. Thereafter we will apply a daily charge until the keys are returned to us. Family, next of kin or representatives acting on behalf of the deceased tenant will be advised to remove all items from the property prior to returning the keys.

- **Eviction** – Where we complete court action to evict a tenant, we will terminate the tenancy on the date we repossess the property.
- **New Build Voids** – Where a new property is handed over to Eildon as complete and is untenanted.
- **Internal Transfers** – Where the tenant is re-housed to another Eildon property. Tenants moving through an internal transfer do not require to provide 28 days written notice. The tenant will, however, also be responsible for the rent on the old property until the keys are returned.

3.2 When a tenant gives notice of intention to terminate the tenancy our staff will seek to elicit the main reason/s for the termination of tenancy. Such information will be collated by location, by house size and type to enable us to identify any key trends and to take remedial action where feasible. This work will also inform Eildon's Property Asset Management Strategy.

4. INSPECTIONS AND RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS

4.1 The purpose of inspections is to ensure that maintenance costs incurred as a consequence of the property becoming void are minimised and that the outgoing tenant is informed of outstanding repairs or redecoration which are their responsibility and which, if not undertaken, will result in a rechargeable repair.

4.2 The following inspections will be carried out throughout the void process:

- Pre-termination inspection – when a tenant informs us that they are leaving their property an inspection will be undertaken prior to them vacating. It will be explained to the outgoing tenant that they must attend to any items that are required to be fixed, that are their responsibility. Where the outgoing tenant does not undertake the work or any works deemed to be the tenant's responsibility are identified after the property has been vacated, these will be recharged to the former tenant.
- Termination inspection – we will carry out a full inspection at this stage where we have not received a termination notice i.e. following the death of a tenant or where the tenant has absconded; where access has not been possible during the 28 days' notice period; or where staff or a contractor has identified a need to carry out an inspection when the tenancy has been terminated. Works will be carried out to ensure that the property meets the minimum letting standard, prior to it being relet. Where any works deemed to be the tenant's responsibility are identified during this inspection, these will be recharged to the former tenant.

5. TARGETS AND STANDARDS

- 5.1 As part of our budget setting process we will review our targets for voids. These targets are published on our website and newsletter. We use regulatory and performance indicators of other similar housing providers to monitor, evaluate and report on our void performance.
- 5.2 Internally, performance will be monitored quarterly by Eildon's Leadership Group and Customer Panel, and reported quarterly to the Board.
- 5.3 Performance information will also be provided quarterly to our tenants.
- 5.4 Based on the previous year's performance, a list of 'slower to let properties' using the definition provided by the Scottish Housing Regulator will be submitted for approval to the Board within Eildon's annual budget. As part of this process initiatives will be developed to support staff to maximising opportunities to increase demand for these properties.

6. PRE-ALLOCATIONS

- 6.1 For re-lets we aim to ensure efficient, effective and sustainable relets take place, with the date of entry as near as possible to the date of termination of the outgoing tenant. We will pre-select an applicant for a vacant property as soon as possible after the notice has been received.
- 6.2 In the case of new homes, our target is to ensure that dates of handover and dates of entry match. We recognise that contractor's handover times may vary from those originally envisaged. For practical purposes, we will work to an early identification of prospective tenants to ensure, as far as possible, that Stage 2 adaptations are maximised and Stage 3 adaptations minimised. For new developments in rural areas (this excludes Galashiels, Hawick, Jedburgh, Peebles, Kelso, Tweedbank, Selkirk, and West Linton) earlier identification of prospective tenants will take place.
- 6.3 The target is to let all new build within 14 calendar days from the handover date from the contractor to Eildon i.e. the Practical Completion Date.
- 6.4 For accommodation which Eildon has, with Board approval, been leased to another organisation, the same standards will be expected and will be monitored through regular meetings with the relevant organisation.

7. PROACTIVE ACTION

7.1 In addition to preventative action which can minimise the likelihood of voids arising the following action will be taken as appropriate:

- All prospective tenants will be accompanied by a staff member to view the property that they have been offered. If the property is still occupied, staff will contact the existing tenant to seek to arrange a suitable time for a viewing.
- At the viewing the prospective tenant will be provided with good quality information and advice to allow them to make an informed decision and to ensure that they are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- As part of the tenancy sign up process, new tenants will be provided with a tenant information pack. New tenants will be asked to confirm that they understand the terms and conditions contained within tenancy agreement.
- Within 8 weeks of the tenancy starting, we will carry out a post allocation visit to ensure new have moved into the property and to identify any support, tenancy and/or property related issues.
- Where tenant gives 28 days' notice properties will be pre-allocated in accordance with our allocations policy with pre-termination inspections planned accordingly.
- Where a void occurs during winter months, arrangements are made either to drain down, to avoid burst pipes, or for heating to be left on at a low level.

7.2 Housing Officers are responsible for ensuring that keys are, upon receipt, immediately made available to the Maintenance Officers and contractors, in order to expedite the process of re-letting and to ensure that any required repairs are actioned timeously. It is essential that all staff, contractors and prospective tenants keep each other informed of progress throughout the void period to ensure that the aims of the policy are achieved.

8. PROPERTY STANDARDS

- 8.1 We operate to a minimum letting standard and aim to relet properties which are suitable for immediate occupation. From time to time minor works will be carried out after the new tenant has moved in. It is the standard which ensures a house is safe and secure for occupation. Before a property is relet, all repairs which are considered essential to make the property habitable for health and safety and security will be done. For ease of reference this is included as Appendix 1.
- 8.2 All void properties which have gas appliances will be subject to a gas safety check prior to the new tenant moving in. All void properties will also have a valid Electrical Safety Certificate and Energy Performance Certificates will be provided as close to the tenancy start date as practicably possible.

9. REDECORATION ALLOWANCES

- 9.1 In circumstances as set out below, we will offer a redecoration allowance at the start of tenancies to ensure that voids are kept to a minimum and customer satisfaction is not compromised. Where the standard of decoration in a property which is to be re-let, is identified by staff as requiring to be brought up to lettable standard, a redecoration allowance or painting pack will be offered to new tenants. This allowance will assist in meeting the costs of redecoration but is not intended to cover them in full.
- 9.2 In most instances, tenants will carry out the redecoration themselves. The exception to this will be cases identified by housing management staff, where the tenant is unable, owing to health, frailty, disability or lack of local assistance to carry out the work. In those cases, we may request a contractor to carry out redecoration only to those areas or rooms noted as unacceptable by staff. In effect this will mean that for elderly amenity, supported accommodation, and for wheelchair accessible accommodation, we will normally carry out this work direct rather than provide a redecoration allowance.
- 9.3 Properties in developments which have been identified annually as slower to let will, when they become void, normally be redecorated in neutral colours to help minimise void losses.

10. SCALE OF PAYMENT

- 10.1 A scale of decoration allowances for all sizes of property will be set annually as part of budget setting. The budget will be based on the previous years' experience for both redecoration allowances and taking into account our turnover of housing stock.
- 10.2 These allowances will be automatically uplifted annually by the same rate of inflation as used to determine rent increases (e.g. RPI as at October each year). The revised redecoration allowances will apply from 1 April each year. The tenant will be advised that we will inspect redecoration as part of a post allocation visit.

11. ADDITIONAL MEASURES

11.1 Environmental

- 11.1.1 It is important that the overall environment is well maintained as well as the property itself which is on offer. In order to assist in ensuring that the local environment contributes positively, staff will at the time of carrying out a void property inspection also inspect common areas and arrange for any uplift e.g. of unwanted goods at the same time.

11.2 Removals

- 11.2.1 Eildon has obtained support from a number of local firms to assist with discounts for removal and furnishing costs, including electrical goods, carpeting and curtains/blinds. Arrangements are in place to ensure only tenants who have been allocated discount vouchers are able to use them. Alongside this our staff will work collaboratively with local furniture and recycling initiatives.

11.3 Financial Inclusion Information

- 11.3.1 Information will routinely be provided to potential tenants about the circumstances under which housing benefit payments can be made on two homes and on the benefits more generally. Information is also routinely provided on the benefits system. Tenants are also shown how to derive most economic benefit from their heating system.

11.4 Security

11.4.1 It may be necessary to secure void properties. The level of security measures should be consistent with the risk which will be affected by:

- property location
- condition of property
- likely void period
- whether property is furnished by Eildon

11.4.2 Measures to be taken may include:

- use of temporary window furnishings to indicate residency
- protection of doors/windows by defensive barriers
- periodic checks by Association staff, noting that this requires to comply with insurance requirements
- portable intruder alarms
- capping of gas meters

12. INSURANCE

12.1 Where a property is void for more than 120 days, the property requires to be checked on a seven day basis with a clear documented record of such checks being maintained, in order to comply with our insurance requirements.

13. MONITORING

13.1 Each Housing Officer is on a weekly basis provided with details of Current Voids and Anticipated Terminations (i.e. those where notice has been given). Details of void periods, house types and sizes are recorded along with reasons for refusal. Proactive use of such information enables us to identify actual or emerging problems and put alternative strategies in place as appropriate.

13.2 Monitoring reports against the targets set out earlier in the policy is provided to the Board as part of the Key Performance Indicator information.

14. COMPLAINTS

- 14.1 We value complaints and endeavour to use information to help us improve our services. Complaints relating to void management are dealt with in line with our complaint handling procedure. Complaints can be made if we fail to apply this policy properly or do not meet our service standards.

15. REVIEW

- 15.1 This policy should be reviewed within three years unless required earlier due to changes in the law, regulation, best practice or requirements of the Association.

APPENDIX 1 – Lettable Standard

LOCATION	TYPE OF WORK / COMMENTS
General	<p>The property will be in sound condition and all necessary statutory checks and tests will be carried out prior to a new tenant moving into the property.</p> <p>As part of the moving in pack a new tenant will receive a copy of the current Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and where applicable the current Gas Safety Certificate (CP12).</p>
Structure	The property will be structurally sound.
Drainage	Drains will be in good working order.
Roof	Roof, gutters and rainwater pipes will be sound well maintained and free from leaks or blockages.
Loft	<p>Lofts will be inspected, and insulation fitted or upgraded where it fails to meet current regulations relating to energy efficiency.</p> <p>Loft spaces will be cleared of former tenants' belongings.</p>
Electrical installation	<p>The electrical installation will have been tested and have a current safety compliance certificate.</p> <p>The property will be fitted with smoke/heat detectors and, where applicable, carbon monoxide detector(s) which comply with current building regulations. We have in place a regular programme to service these detectors and will carry out a further check at each void.</p> <p>At each void, we will fit energy saving light bulbs throughout the property and provide information to the new tenant on how to replace them when required.</p>
Heating Systems	The property will have a fully functioning and tested heating system with all necessary safety and compliance certificates in place.

LOCATION	TYPE OF WORK / COMMENTS
Plumbing	The plumbing system will be in good working order.
Bathroom / shower room / toilet	<p>All sanitary-ware will be clean and in good condition; taps and showers will be in good working order and plugs will be in place in bath and wash hand basin(s).</p> <p>Cistern flush and overflows are in good working order.</p> <p>Where practicable 2 rows of high tiled splash back or where shower installed full height around wet area.</p> <p>As part of our new build and modernisation programme, we will fit wall boards instead of tiling. At void we will inspect the wall board to ensure it remains sealed. We may replace tiled areas with wall boards at void where tiling is in poor condition.</p> <p>Where provided, floor covering to be in good condition.</p>
Kitchen	<p>Kitchen sink will be clean and in good condition; taps will be in good working order and plug will be in place.</p> <p>Where practical minimum 2 rows high tiled splash back</p> <p>As part of our new build and modernisation programme, we will fit splashbacks instead of tiling. We may replace tiled areas with splashback at void where tiling is in poor condition</p> <p>Worktops to be sound and silicone sealed at wall abutments above worktops and sink.</p> <p>Gas supply pipe and / or electric cooker point will be available.</p> <p>Kitchen to have facility/space for washing machine (including plumbing) and fridge/freezer, where practicable. Exceptions will exist where no provision has been made e.g. some sheltered housing developments.</p> <p>Where provided, floor covering to be in good condition.</p>

LOCATION	TYPE OF WORK / COMMENTS
Floors/Stairs	<p>Floors and stairs will be safe and free of loose floorboards, treads and risers.</p> <p>Existing floor coverings will be removed except where classed as in good condition and / or incoming tenant has expressed an interest to keep existing floor coverings. Notwithstanding this existing laminate flooring will be removed from flats.</p>
Windows	<p>Windows will be secure and open safely and easily and restrictors (if applicable) are working properly.</p> <p>An adequate number of security locks and keys are supplied for windows and in place when the property is relet or as soon as is practical if they need to be reordered.</p> <p>Window frames, furniture and glazing will be in good condition.</p>
Doors	<p>Locks will be replaced at each tenancy change. Two sets of keys, (or where applicable) fobs will be provided.</p> <p>Doors, door frames and furniture (including door closers where required) will be in good condition.</p>
Walls & Ceilings	<p>Walls and ceilings will be free from holes or major damage.</p>
Ventilation	<p>Adequate ventilation will be provided to kitchen & bathroom.</p>
Clean & Clear	<p>The property will be clean and cleared of all furniture (unless provided by the Association) lampshades and general rubbish and be free from bad odours.</p>
External	<p>Gardens will be cleared of any rubbish and left in a neat and tidy condition.</p> <p>Boundary fences and walls will be safe and in reasonable condition.</p> <p>Paths and steps will be free from trip hazards.</p> <p>Where feasible, clothes poles or rotary dryer will be provided.</p> <p>Garages will be free from any rubbish.</p>

LOCATION	TYPE OF WORK / COMMENTS
<p>Decoration</p>	<p>The property will be in reasonable decorative order and be free from evidence of mould.</p> <p>Redecoration will generally be the responsibility of the tenant.</p> <p>Where the quality of decoration is considered to be below an acceptable standard i.e. paint coverage uneven, wallpaper ripped, nicotine stained, or the staff member inspecting the property considers it to be of poor quality, the new tenant will be allocated a voucher/allowance, or redecoration will be undertaken by Eildon for each room assessed as being below the acceptable standard.</p> <p>In most cases a voucher/allowance will be issued to the new tenants. However, for all properties categorised as elderly amenity, supported housing, or wheelchair accessible, or where the tenant is moving into general housing but is assessed as being vulnerable, we may undertake the decoration on their behalf where required.</p> <p>As part of our incentive packages for properties designated as low demand, we may provide a decoration package.</p> <p>Details of the decoration allowances offered are available from Association staff.</p>
<p>Fixtures and Fittings</p>	<p>Any fixtures/fittings installed by the previous tenant which have potential Health and Safety implications will be removed.</p> <p>Any fixtures/fittings belonging to the Association which have been removed by the previous tenant will be reinstated.</p>