



Halton
Housing

Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Halton Housing has recently undertaken a review of its void repair's standard, which included an independent audit of our operating processes by our Customer Scrutiny Panel. The outcome of this review has highlighted opportunities to update this policy to ensure it encompasses the agreed recommendations, that it fully reflects good practice and that it supports our key strategies for Asset Management and Customer Focus.
- 1.2 Halton Housing is committed to continuous improvement in performance of void re-let times / void loss and to ensuring that properties are repaired in accordance with our asset management strategy.
- 1.3 This revised policy, together with the associated procedures, will assist Halton Housing to ensure that we re-let our properties in a condition that meets our regulatory requirements, protects the business from legal claims regarding dis-repair and no-compliance, along with an acceptable quality for incoming customers that helps to promote sustainable tenancies.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1 The Void Repair Policy sets out Halton Housing's approach to conducting repairs to vacant properties for re-letting of which the principles are:
 - That our voids standard aims to promote and achieve sustainable tenancies for our customers
 - That we provide a home that meets all of all regulatory requirements in respect of Homes Fitness for Habitation Standard 2018
 - That we aim to minimise rent loss whilst the home is vacant, but that we take a balanced approach in identifying the opportunity to undertake any major refurbishment works such as planned investment and decarbonisation
 - That we will aim to identify opportunities to maximise any goods/fixtures/fittings within the property for new incoming customers where they are serviceable and meeting regulations
 - To ensure the repair and management of void properties is delivered in an effective and consistent manner, minimising the time between the property becoming void and being re-let, and achieving overall VFM
 - The delivery of the void service where possible will be undertaken by our in-house repairs team of Maintenance Technicians, with support for external sub-contractors as deemed required

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- To use the tenancy relinquishment notice period, which is four weeks in line with the terms of their tenancy agreement, and where possible conduct a void inspection identifying any repairs that will need completing in the void period
 - The Neighbourhood Team to try and gain access by way of a mutually agreed appointment to properties to visit all out-going tenant's homes before the end of their tenancy, to ensure that they clearly understand that the condition of their tenancy requires them to remove all furniture, personal possessions and rubbish from the property and to leave it in good repair, decorative order and in a clean and safe condition
 - To minimise void re-let times, all void properties will be pre-allocated where possible.

New Home Standard

- 2.2 Halton Housing has established an acceptable standard at which homes will be re-let. This standard aims to ensure that all our properties that are ready for letting to customers are “safe, clean and clear” as a set guide to meet current HOMES (fitness for human habitation) Act 2018 and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System guidance (HHSRS).
- 2.3 This means that the property will be re-let in a condition that meets the agreed Void Property Standards that are safe, and all necessary repairs will have been undertaken to ensure customers' health and safety. This includes a structurally sound property, new lock changes throughout, security measures being completed ensuring all windows and doors are in full working order, clear pathways, gas capped, full electrical installation condition reports conducted meeting fire regulations and compliance legislation along with energy performance, water hygiene measures checked, and asbestos risk assessments managed.
- 2.4 The property will be clean; all kitchen units, worktops, sanitaryware, tiles, woodwork, floors, and internal windows will be cleaned and bacteria free.
- 2.5 The property will be clear; clear of infestations, all previous customers' personal belongings will have been removed from the property, including the loft, and the gardens being free from rubbish. All works will be conducted as per the approved Voids Checklist.

Electrical Safety Checks

- 2.6 An electrical condition report will be conducted on every void property with all observational works completed prior to re-letting the property. The Lead

electrical qualifying supervisor will check all paperwork to ensure the correct certification has been completed and all works have been completed.

Gas Safety Checks

- 2.7 Gas will be capped on all void properties, with the aim being within 2 hours or when reasonably practical, no later than 24 hours of the date the keys come into the Homes Void Team. A visual inspection is conducted if the systems cannot be tested.

Water Hygiene and Legionella Management

- 2.8 In managing the potential risks from Legionella, HH will undertake a risk based and best practice approach in relation to our domestic properties in order to ensure that the water systems in them are safe when customers move in, and the systems are maintained in a safe condition throughout the duration of the tenancy. Our strategy includes the installation of combi-boilers to replace water storage tanks, the flushing of all outlets prior to re-let and the removal of dead-legs and redundant pipework.

Asbestos Management

- 2.9 As a property becomes void, those controlling access, egress and instruction of works to a void property shall check for relevant existing survey data. Where such data is not available, they shall arrange for a management survey. This information will be obtained prior to any work activities taking place.

Fire Safety Management

- 2.10 Halton Housing will ensure that all of its domestic properties that do not require a fire risk assessment are managed and maintained in order to minimise any potential fire risks. When a property becomes void, all equipment, components and systems will be subjected to inspection and test as part of the void works.

HHSRS

- 2.11 As part of the void inspection The Void Manager and their team shall identify any potential risks as identified in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System guidance (HHSRS). Works to mitigate these risks shall be conducted as part of the void works.

Decarbonisation Measures

- 2.12 Halton Housing aims to achieve a minimum of EPC Band C for homes by 2030, and Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050 in line with UK policy and regulatory targets. To support wider Halton Housing energy efficiency programme in

homes, the following proactive measures will be taken in void properties to reduce carbon emissions:-

- The removal of all forms of fixed gas or electrical secondary heating in homes, where it is supplementary to the main central heating system.
- LED bulbs to be fitted, where budget allows, to all fixed standard bayonet lighting points as a gift to the incoming customer. HH will not be responsible for the replacement of LED lightbulbs during the tenancy period.

Gifting Items for re-use

- 2.13 As part of the approach to ensuring properties are safe, clean and clear, it may be possible that Halton Housing would agree to customers leaving certain items in the property for the incoming customer, if it is felt that they are in very good condition.
- 2.14 These items could include, for example, fitted carpets and fitted bedroom furniture in very good condition. Should the incoming customer wish to retain the items Halton Housing will require them to sign a disclaimer that HH will not be responsible for the future repair or maintenance of those items. Should the incoming customer not wish to retain the items, HH will remove them at the point of commencement of the tenancy.

Additional Works

- 2.15 Halton Housing's Neighbourhood Options team can instruct Homes Services to undertake a higher standard of work to low demand or difficult to let properties over and above the safe, clean and clear standard. The Neighbourhood Allocations Team can also request Homes Services to prioritise high demand properties over others to enable early re-letting.

Decoration

- 2.16 As a rule, none of our properties will be redecorated nor will Halton Housing issue new customers with a decorating allowance. Determination of any decoration allowance will rest with Neighbourhood Allocations Team

Post Move-in Repairs

- 2.17 To ensure that customers can move into their new homes as quickly as possible, we may defer some minor repairs or work where there is a lead in time for materials until after move-in. Customers will be informed what work will be done after move-in and an appointment(s) will be made for the work to be completed. All promissory items will be listed on the Post Inspection form, a copy of which will be provided to the customer.

Planned Investment Work

- 2.18 If Halton Housing intends to do any major works within the first twelve months of a new tenancy, we will inform the customer so that they can plan any decorating they may wish to do and avoid any unnecessary expense.
- 2.19 As a rule, we will only replace major components in a void property if it has been missed during previous investment work cycles, damaged and deemed unrepairable, or if the property is in the current year's investment programme area and would be carried out anyway.
- 2.20 If the surveyor deems a void property to require the replacement of any major components prior to re-letting, this will be undertaken to the same standard as the investment programme works. If possible, we would allow the new customer choices (e.g. kitchen) but if this is not possible, we would adopt a default type on major components.

Works in Progress (WIP) and Final inspections

- 2.21 Void Team leads will conduct WIP inspections on every property to ensure that the work is of a high-quality standard and that the teams are working in a safe manner. Additional works may be identified and authorised at this point if it is consequently because of other works being conducted.
- 2.22 All properties will be post-inspected following the final clean to ensure that all ordered works have been conducted and that the works meet the Void Property Standard. Photographs will be taken of every room and all external areas to demonstrate the condition the property was let in. Post inspection forms will be stored within the Housing Management cloud based DocuWare system.

Back-to-Back Lettings

- 2.23 We will aim to undertake void inspections whilst the outgoing customer is still in situ with the aim of increasing back-to-back lettings where possible.

Inspections

- 2.24 An inspection and gas cap off will be conducted within 48 hours on void properties once the keys have been passed to the Voids Team.
- 2.25 Risk assessment's will be conducted in relation to security and safety isolation procedures, with photographic evidence of the condition of the property and garden taken and stored against the address and outgoing customer.

Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

2.26 In conjunction with the Governments guidance that homes should meet a minimum requirement of EPC C by 2030, prior to letting our homes we will assess the current energy efficiency to determine whether any works need to be undertaken prior or post letting. An Energy Performance Certificate will be completed and provided to the incoming customer upon sign up.

Gas Certificate (LGSR)

2.27 When the property is re-let, the gas will be uncapped with a full gas service conducted, along with a new LGSR (Landlords Gas Safety Record) certificate issued.

Safeguarding

2.28 Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff have varying levels of involvement dependant on job roles. All staff are responsible for raising alerts or 'concerns' where they believe abuse may be taking place. Many staff such as the Void Maintenance Technicians and Team Leaders have frequent contact with customers in their homes and may see, hear or be told something that suggests abuse or neglect may be taking place.

2.29 All staff are to ensure that their line manager is made aware of a potential safeguarding referral as soon as possible. The incident must be reported within 2 hours upon staff member concerned being made aware.

Customer Recharges

2.30 Any rectification of damage or repairs that are required because of customer's accidents or neglect, are the responsibility of the previous customer and a standard recharge will be made to cover the cost of rectifying the damage.

Performance Management

2.31 Effective and regular performance management is essential in delivering the service. Strategic and operational performance indicators will be collected, monitored and reviewed. This approach will ensure both effective management and continuous improvement in the service as well as informing the strategic direction.

2.32 Performance will be benchmarked with both peer groups and top quartile organisations.

2.33 Annual performance targets will be set and agreed by Board and may include:

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- Void rent loss
 - Average void turnaround time in maintenance
 - Key to key void turnaround times
 - Customer satisfaction with condition of home

Customer Satisfaction

2.34 Feedback from customers will be sought through satisfaction surveys to ensure that this commitment is being met. Customer complaints will be treated seriously with a focus on early resolution.

Primary responsibility for implementation of the policy lies with:
Scott Murray – Director of Homes

Day to day responsibility for implementation of the policy lies with:
Jon Blackwell – Head of Repairs and Maintenance

3. Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance

3.1 This Policy supports HH's compliance with the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018.

3.2 The Regulator of Social Housing's current Regulatory Framework that came into force from April 2012 has some specific outcomes and expectations within the Home and Tenancy Standards that relate to this policy.

3.3 Home Standard

- *"1.1a ensure that tenants' homes meet the standard set out in section five of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance and continue to maintain their homes to at least this standard"*
- *"2.2.1 Registered providers shall ensure a prudent, planned approach to repairs and maintenance of homes and communal areas. This should demonstrate an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs, and value for money. The approach should include, responsive and cyclical repairs, planned and capital work, work on empty properties, and adaptations"*

3.4 Tenancy Standard

- 2.1.5 Registered providers shall minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting. When doing this, they shall take into account the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties.

4. Diversity Considerations

- 4.1 We have completed an Equality Impact Screening Checklist which confirms that an EIA Stage 2 assessment is not required.

5. Links to Strategies, Policies and Associated Documents

- 5.1 This Policy underpins three of the priorities in our 'Corporate Plan'

- Place
- Customer
- Homes

- 5.2 The void repairs policy is a key element of Halton Housing's overall approach to the Asset Management Strategy which sets out how we will deal with all property related assets and aims to ensure that the repair of properties prior to reletting is efficient, timely and represents value for money.

- 5.3 Associated Policies and Procedures:

- Adapted Void Property Process
- Void Optimisation Policy
- Recharge Policy
- Gas Servicing Policy
- Fire Safety Management Policy
- Asbestos Management Policy
- Water Hygiene and Legionella Management Policy
- Electrical Testing and Inspection Policy
- Repairs Policy
- Safeguarding Policy



Translations available on request by phoning 0303 333 0101 or
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