

Policy

Title:

Void and Property Optimisation Policy

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Service area applies to:

Customer and Homes

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SharePoint Published Documents

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Halton Housing (HH) is committed to continuous improvement in performance of void re-let times and at the same time ensuring that we maintain a consistent and transparent approach in allocating our homes.
- 1.2 HH administers a Choice Based Lettings service called Property Pool Plus in Halton and has taken account of legislative changes that affects both new and existing customers.
- 1.3 Voids are properties which are currently empty because a tenancy has ended, and a new tenancy has not yet started. Void property may arise due to formal termination of a tenancy, abandonment of a tenancy, a customer transferring to another tenancy, eviction of the customer/s or due to the customers 's death.
- 1.4 Because rent is not due on a void, it represents a loss and Halton Housing aims to keep this loss to a minimum whilst ensuring that a property is let to the right applicant and to the standards as set out in the voids repairs policy as quickly as possible.
- 1.5 This policy impacts several areas within HH, including Neighbourhood Allocations, Neighbourhood Teams, Homes and Asset Management.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to create sustainable tenancies – where the customer can call it their home and to set out our approach when dealing with void properties, to ensure that HH provides an efficient and effective customer focused service.
- 2.2 HH will look to continue to meet housing needs, maximise rental income by focussing resources, whilst ensuring priority is given to minimising re-let time on void properties by repairing and letting them within strict target timescales.
- 2.3 HH is aware of its requirement to ensure that all assets, especially housing stock are fully utilised. Therefore, HH's approach is to maximise the use of its properties and will be achieved by:
 - Looking to involve its customers in the management of empty properties by encouraging them to report abandoned properties, illegal squatting, vandalism, and theft from empty properties
 - Involving Customer Scrutiny Panel to audit the standard of voids, to ensure we are putting the customer experience at the heart of the process,

complying with regulatory and legislative requirements, achieving value for money in repairing void properties and achieving the re-let standard

- Balancing the need to minimise rent loss whilst letting empty properties to the right applicant in terms of HBC/Property Pool Allocations Policy and Halton Housing Lettings policy, so ensuring best use of our housing stock
- Having in place a specific process for identifying poorly performing stock and determining its future use, which complies with the regulatory requirements, consistency and with our Asset Management Strategy
- Maximises customer satisfaction in relation to the standard of their new home
- Maximising the use of stock with adaptations
- Minimising void periods
- Reducing void rent loss through effective use of 4-week notice periods when tenancies terminate, including property inspections being completed to identify any repairs, unauthorised alterations, and wilful or accidental damage
- Actively encouraging the use of “mutual exchanges” as an alternative to creating a void and to ensure customers have more choice
- Where possible make use of Direct Allocations under the HH Lettings Policy, when for example customers must be moved due to repairs, management transfers, health reasons, or downsizing
- Ensuring that rent debts are not transferred unless for exceptional circumstances such as Domestic Abuse
- Adhering to and making best use of the Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy
- Liaising with other appropriate agencies concerning the needs of customers both as individuals and communities
- Developing initiatives / incentives to minimise void loss and improve re-let times
- Utilising apprenticeship schemes such as PIP to enhance void resources and minimise void loss
- Utilising other options for reducing Council Tax premiums e.g. use of Ad-Hoc Guardians where appropriate

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- Reviewing disposal options when appropriate, in line with RSH guidance
 - Appraising the extent of repairs/ planned and improvement works required to each property and making decisions on what to do whilst void and when let, in accordance with our Voids standard
 - To remove a property from the rent debit run that meets the criteria, where for example the Police have issued a closure order, or where there are major works required following a flood or fire damage, outside of the normal scope of voids works.
 - Taking regard to the personal circumstances of our customers and putting in place or sign posting them to support to help them sustain their tenancy
- 2.4 The Director of Customer Experience has full responsibility for the implementation of this Policy.
- 2.5 Day-to-day responsibility for the operation and monitoring of this policy lies with the Head of Neighbourhoods, Head of Repairs & Maintenance and the Neighbourhood Allocations Manager. All relevant employees have a responsibility to ensure that this policy is applied.

3. Regulatory or Legal Compliance

- 3.1 The RSH's current Regulatory Framework has some specific outcomes and expectations within the Home and Tenancy Standards that relate to this policy.
- 3.2 HH will look to meet these regulatory requirements by the effective implementation of this policy. This policy also ensures that HH complies with the following legislation: -
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, Housing Acts 1995 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002
 - Localism Act 2012
 - Welfare Reform Act 2012
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Homeless Reductions Act 2017; implemented on 3 April 2018
 - The Social Housing Resident Charter: The Social Housing White Paper (2020)
 - Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018
 - Safety & Quality Standard
 - Tenancy Standard

4. Diversity Considerations

- 4.1 Following completion of the Equality Impact Screening Checklist, this confirms that an EIA Stage 2 assessment is not required.

5. Links to Strategies, Policies and other Documents

- 5.1 This policy supports our Future Focus:

- Excellent Services
- Strong Business

- 5.2 Associated Policy Documents and Procedures;

- Asset Management Strategy
- Voids Repairs Policy
- Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy
- Diversity Policy
- Succession Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Abandoned Property Procedure
- Tenancy Policy
- Recharges Policy
- Stock Appraisal and Disposal Policy
- Rent Collection Payments and Arrears Management Policy
- Aids and Adaptations Policy
- Tenancy Support Procedure
- Affordability Policy
- Lettings Policy
- Local Lettings Framework Procedure



Translations are available on request, by calling 0303 333 0101.

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