



Void Management Policy

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Definition
3. Aims and Objectives
4. Policy Statement
 - 4.2 Approach and method
 - 4.3 Notice of termination
 - 4.4 Bereavement
 - 4.5 Abandonment
 - 4.6 Pre – allocation
 - 4.7 Lettable standard
 - 4.8 Void inspection and categories
 - 4.9 Gas and Electrical Safety
5. Legislative / Statutory background
6. Confidentiality
7. Equality and Diversity
8. Monitoring and Evaluation
9. Customer Involvement
10. Related Policies and Procedures
11. Policy Approval

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy sets out the way that Ekaya Housing Association (Ekaya) manages its empty properties and re-lets them.
- 1.2. Ekaya aims to provide quality housing to its customers and ensure that properties are available to re-let at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.3. When a tenancy is terminated we use the term 'void' or 'void property' to describe an empty property. Before a void property can be re-let it must be inspected, checked and work carried out, to turn a void around from vacancy to re-let. Please refer to Ekaya Housing Association's **Letting and Allocations Policy** for information on the nominations and allocations process regarding void properties.

2.0 Definition

- 2.1 A void is any property that is untenanted for a period of time. There are many reasons for properties becoming empty, some of the reasons are listed below:
 - Formal termination
 - Death of tenant
 - Abandonment
 - Eviction
 - Transfers
- 2.2 Void property works can be defined as any repairs, renewals, tests, reinstatement, replacement, internal decorations or cleaning and clearing that has been ordered in accordance with the provisions of the contract, arising as a result of a change of tenancy (not including mutual exchanges). The aim of this is to bring the void property up to Ekaya's 'lettable standard' as quickly and cost effectively as possible, to allow us to re-let it to a new tenant.

3.0 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

3.1 Aims

- 3.2 Ekaya aims to provide quality housing to its customers and ensure that properties are available to re-let at the earliest opportunity. This means managing the stock efficiently to not cause unnecessary delays and to:
 - assist in meeting the overall re-let annual target. Please refer to Annual **Key Performance Indicator (KPI's) target**
 - develop a consistent, coordinated, measurable and effective approach to achieving the best possible service
 - ensure that vacant properties are left empty for the minimum amount of time
 - ensure the customer does not suffer any unnecessary delays obtaining a property
 - ensure that Ekaya does not incur any unnecessary loss of rent

3.3 Objectives:

- to ensure that customers receive a good, consistent standard of property when they sign a new tenancy or license agreement
- to work closely with contractors to get properties repaired to the right standard and as quickly as possible
- to ensure that housing management and property staff work together in a coordinated way to proactively manage the voids process
- to effectively monitor and evaluate performance
- to develop good systems of communication and information sharing across, agencies in all local authority (LA) areas in which we operate
- To ensure all legal responsibilities and good practice in relation to void management are adhered to such as gas, electrical safety and energy performance

4.0 POLICY STATEMENT

4.1 Ekaya will ensure void works are delivered to our 'lettable standard' that we have agreed with customers. Ekaya will work to minimise void turnaround time to deliver an efficient, value for money, customer orientated service that maximises our role in tackling the demand for social housing in the areas we operate.

4.2 Approach and Method:

All our homes will be let in accordance with our Local Authority Nominations agreement. Nominations agreements are agreed with the relevant Local Authority, and will usually be split into:

- New Build homes – a newly built rented home, which has never been tenanted before
- 100% of newly built homes are offered to the Local Authority, and no transfers will be permitted at first let stage.
- Re-let – any home that is not on its first let, and will usually have a void period between tenancies, in order to ensure the home is let according to our homes standard, in a safe, clean manner and with all necessary repairs completed.
- Re-lets will usually be split as 75% offered to the Local Authority to make nomination, and 25% to be let to residents seeking a transfer. The use of choice-based lettings and advertising properties will also help to minimise void periods.

4.3 Notices for Termination

4.2.1 For General Needs properties, the notice required will normally be 28 days, ending on a Sunday, in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement.

4.2.2 For Supported Housing properties, the notice period is one week, ending on a Sunday, in accordance with Ekaya's licence agreement.

4.2.3 In exceptional circumstances, the Housing Officer should refer to the Housing Services Manager for a decision to set aside the need for full notice; although this should only occur in cases where there is good cause; e.g. someone fleeing extreme violence (Domestic Violence or harassment with Police safety report). This should be recorded on the termination notice form and on SDM. Where discretion is used, this must be recorded in the tenant file and on SDM rent accounting as a diary entry.

- 4.2.4 Except in the situation where the tenancy is terminated by a Court Order, the tenant should return all keys to the property to Ekaya's offices no later than 10 am on the Monday following the termination date, unless this falls on a bank holiday Monday or public holiday, in which case it will be the next day.
- 4.2.5 The key register on the SDM void module should be maintained by the Customer Services Officer

Transfers:

Internal transfers to another of our homes will normally only be permitted when there are no arrears, and a satisfactory property inspection has taken place.

Transfers will be used to address housing needs of under occupiers and optimise our housing stock

4.2.6 Goods left in properties after end of tenancy

- 4.2.7 We will advise tenants that goods must be cleared at the end of a tenancy and after eviction, we will serve a TORT notice of our intention to dispose of the goods where possible. We will make reasonable efforts to trace the owner of abandoned goods and instruct them to retrieve their goods within a given period. This includes contacting next-of-kin in cases when a customer has passed away.

4.4 Bereavement

- 4.3.1 Where a tenant has died and there is no-one to succeed to the tenancy, the Association must deal sensitively with the executors of the late tenant's estate or next of kin. As entitlement to housing benefit or Universal credit ceases from the date of death, where the late tenant is in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit, this will cease from the date of death and full rent will be charged.
- 4.3.2 In cases where the property has become empty due to the death of a tenant, the executors or next of kin will still be required to provide us with four weeks' notice of termination and rent will be charged for this period. The rent charged will be a charge to the estate of the late tenant. We will ask the executors or next of kin to pay this amount, together with any outstanding amounts from the late tenant's estate.
- 4.3.3 If the executors or next of kin state there are no funds in the late tenant's estate to pay the amount due, we will ask for a certificate of probate to confirm this and once provided will close the matter and make arrangements to write off the debt.

4.5 Abandonment

- 4.5.1 Abandoned properties will be dealt with in line with the [Abandonment Policy and Procedures](#)

4.6 Pre-Allocation

- 4.6.1 The Housing Officer and Customer Service Officer will use the pre-termination period to seek nominations from local authority or match the property for internal transfer from the waiting list. They will seek a nomination from the local authority within 24hrs of receiving a notice of termination, unless they do not have the required information to complete this task. In which case they must prioritise obtaining this information and requesting nomination in the shortest possible time. Please refer to the [Lettings and Allocation policy](#) for true void (LA's nomination properties) and non-true void (internal

transfer properties). The Housing Officer should interview the prospective new tenant to determine if the prospective new tenant will be able to manage financially and their suitability to the property.

- 4.6.2 If the property is in good condition, it may be possible for an accompanied viewing to be arranged with the incoming tenant prior to the termination date. This should only be done with the agreement of the outgoing tenant.
- 4.6.3 If it was not possible to allow a viewing before the termination of the tenancy, this should be arranged once the outgoing tenant has moved out. This needs to be arranged with the Property Team who must confirm that the property is safe to view beforehand. The Property Team will in turn liaise with the contractor and let them know when the viewing is going to take place.
- 4.6.4 A copy of the specification of works should be left at the property or provided to the Housing Officer so that the prospective tenant can be informed of all works being completed to bring the property up to Ekaya's lettable standard.

4.7 LETTABLE STANDARD

Ekaya will ensure that all void properties when inspected will comply with the Government Decent Home Standard. This will ensure that properties will take into account and comply with:

- Gas safety
- Electrical safety
- Fire safety
- Asbestos safety
- Water safety
- Lift safety
- Free from Damp
- Comply with the Decent Homes Standards
- Comply with the fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018

Ekaya will ensure that at the point of occupancy the property will be:

- a fit, safe and secure home
- structurally sound and where possible energy efficient
- weather tight, damp free and properly ventilated
- ready for all operating connections to the main utilities
- provided with fully functioning gas central heating or other types of heating system
- useable and safe with kitchen and bathroom
- installed with a smoke detector
- decorated to the agreed standard, or decorating vouchers provided
- provided with furniture and shared white goods (Supported Housing only)
- provided with a Home Guide as part of the sign-up process (General Needs only)
- ready with a valid LGSR (gas safety), EICR (electrical safety) and EPC (energy performance) certificates
- Equipped with Safety catches/locks to windows
- Cleaned to the following standard before you move in:
 - Sweep and clean the floors
 - Clean the kitchen units and worktops
 - Clean the bathroom and toilet fittings.

4.8 Void (Empty) Property Inspections

4.8.1 The full inspection of voids will be carried out once the premises are empty. Joint pre-void inspections will take place with the outgoing tenant to understand the condition of the property as early in the process as possible. Where an inspection identifies damage to the property, the residents will be advised that they need to put the damage right before they return the keys to Ekaya. Photographs will be taken, and this will be confirmed in writing by Ekaya (Property Surveyor). If the damage is not put right, Ekaya will recharge the resident. Please refer to the [Recharge Policy](#).

4.8.2 Long & Short-term voids

4.8.3 Void properties are divided into two categories, long and short-term voids. Short term voids are properties that are vacant and can be re-let within a reasonable period and usually within Ekaya's target time set by the key performance indicator.

4.8.4 A long term void occurs where Ekaya is unable to re-let a property in the normal way due to a number of reasons. Ekaya defines a long-term void as a property:

- Where we have to remove asbestos
- The cost of the void works is £5,000 or more, including VAT
- Replacement at least one major component element of a home, for example a complete kitchen or bathroom
- The property is unfit for human habitation

4.9 GAS AND ELECTRICAL SAFETY

4.9.1 Ekaya will carry out a gas safety inspection and issue appropriate certification. It will also test and inspect electrical installations. Safety certificates and guarantees including Landlord Gas Safety Certificate (LGSR), Energy Performance certificate (EPC) and Domestic Electric installation condition report (EICR) will be maintained on Ekaya's files. Copies will be included in the Residents' Moving-in Pack provided at sign-up.

5.0 LEGISLATIVE /STATUTORY BACKGROUND

5.1 Ekaya accepts the importance of managing its housing stock in an equitable manner in line with the demands of housing legislation as defined by the Housing Acts and the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). Ekaya expects its contractors to ensure compliance with all legal requirements and statutory obligations during the voids period under

- The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Housing Act 1985, 1988 & 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998
- General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Home (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Regulations 2015 and Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendments) Regulations 2022
- The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

6.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

6.1 As part of the void process we will manage any personal data in line with the General Data Protection Act Regulations (GDPR) 2018 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Officers will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the residents concerned, unless:

- Ekaya is required by law
- the information is necessary for the protection of children

7.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

7.1 Ekaya provides housing primarily to Black and Ethnic Minority women, their families and other groups with similar needs and acts within its own **Equality and Diversity Policy**. When required and where we can afford to do so, Ekaya will use the void period to make necessary adjustments and adaptations to a property to suit an incoming client's particular needs, such as grab handles for easy access. Adaptations are usually paid for by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) provided by local authorities.

8.0 MONITORING & EVALUATION

8.1 Performance is measured against the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):

- meeting statutory requirements, such as ensuring EPC, electric and gas safety certificates are in all void properties (LGSR)
- achieving overall re-let time (void turnaround) within our target.
- Long and short term void times monitored in accordance with contracts
- Void rent loss is monitored for both long and short term voids

9.0 CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

9.1 In addition to reporting on all aspects of the void management process, it is equally important to monitor the outcome of the voids process from our customers' perspective.

9.2 We will ask outgoing tenants why they are moving, and we will ask incoming tenants to tell about their experience of moving into their new home, the support and advice they received from Ekaya and their satisfaction with their new home. We will ask incoming tenants for their feedback when we carry out the settling visit within six weeks of moving into their new home.

10.0 RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

10.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Repairs and Maintenance policy
- Recharge policy
- Lettings and Allocation Policy

11.0 POLICY APPROVAL

11.1 This policy will be reviewed once every three years except where there is a need to take account of any changes to legislation, regulation or good practice.

Policy Approval

<i>Approval date:</i>	<i>October 2024</i>
<i>Approved by:</i>	<i>Policy & Performance Committee</i>
<i>Policy Author:</i>	<i>Housing Services Manager</i>
<i>Policy Owner:</i>	<i>Head of Service</i>
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