



## Void Property Management Policy

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST	
<b>Policy Guardian:</b>	Operations Director
<b>Author:</b>	Operations Director
<b>Version number:</b>	2
<b>Approved by Chief Executive on:</b>	-
<b>Approved by Management Board on:</b>	December 2015
<b>Effective from:</b>	9 December 2015
<b>Due for review on:</b>	December 2018
<b>Diversity compliant:</b>	Yes
<b>Equality Impact Assessment required:</b>	No
<b>Data Protection compliant:</b>	Yes
<b>Health &amp; Safety compliant:</b>	Yes
<b>Procedure implemented:</b>	December 2015
<b>QL system changes made:</b>	Not required
<b>KPI's/reporting arrangements implemented:</b>	Not required
<b>Training completed:</b>	Not required
<b>Posted on Intranet:</b>	9 December 2015
<b>Posted on website:</b>	9 December 2015
<b>Publicity material issued:</b>	N/A
<b>Business Services Implementation Review:</b>	

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# CALEDONIA HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

## POLICY STATEMENT: VOID PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The turnover of housing stock is an integral part of social housing provision that inevitably results in periods where properties are void (empty). Caledonia Housing Association is aware that the good management of void properties and the limitation of void periods is vital to maximise rental income, provide a quality service, meet housing need and achieve good estate management.

### 2 SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the Association's position on the management of voids.
- 2.2 Void management activity covers a number of related activities. These include
- tenancy termination
  - property inspections
  - identifying rechargeable works and other tenant responsibilities
  - ordering and supervising repair work
  - offering tenancies and arranging viewing
  - creating tenancies, signing tenancy agreements etc.
- 2.3 The Void Property Management Policy applies to all rented property owned or managed by the Association.
- 2.4 The Void Property Management Policy complies with and supplements Caledonia's Financial Regulations.

### 3 CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Void Property Management Policy meets with legislative and good practice requirements, this includes the following:

**Scottish Secure Tenancy** – The Association can exercise direct control over its tenants via the terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement. The purpose of this is to protect the interest of its tenants, the wider community and the Association.

**Housing (Scotland Act) 2001** - The Void Property Management Policy adheres to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, in particular guidance in relation to the termination of a tenancy (notified or abandoned), compensation for improvements and access rights for inspection.

**The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008** – the Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have a valid Energy Performance Certificate in place.

**The Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1994** – the Association will ensure that it allocates void properties that have benefited from an annual inspection of gas installations and appliances as appropriate. In all cases a gas safety check will be carried out prior to handover of keys.

**The Construction, Design and Management Regulations** – The Association ensures that it meets Health and Safety requirements in the management of voids, particularly relating to repairs by Association or contracted staff.

**Data Protection Act 1998** - Within the terms of the Data Protection Act the Association will ensure that information provided by an applicant and/or tenant, or sought by the Association is relevant only to the management of void properties and that all such information received is treated in the strictest confidence.

Under the provisions of the Data Protection Act, individuals have the right to see and receive a copy of any personal information (for which a small fee may be charged) that is held about them by the Association and to have any inaccuracies corrected.

- 3.2 The Void Property Management Policy also complies with the guidelines set by The Scottish Government in the Social Housing Charter. In terms of the management of voids, the Charter states that every social landlord must:

**“Housing quality and maintenance**

**4: Quality of housing**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- tenants’ homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.”

- 3.3 This policy is supported by a Void Property Management Procedure, which includes processes for the effective management, monitoring, repair and re-let together with a difficult to let procedure for vacant properties. A copy of the Association’s Service Standards and Minimum Letting Standard are appended to this policy for information.

- 3.4 The Association will ensure that all staff receive appropriate training and support to meet the requirements of this policy and related procedures.

**4 POLICY AIMS**

- 4.1 The overall aim of the Void Property Management Policy is to ensure that empty Association properties are let in an efficient, cost effective and equitable fashion.

- 4.2 The specific objectives of the Void Property Management Policy are:

- to ensure that properties allocated by the Association meet acceptable standards
- to ensure that rent loss through vacant housing is minimised

- to ensure that the Association makes the most effective use of the housing resources available to it, to meet housing need.

#### 4.3 To achieve the above objectives the Association will –

- provide a clear statement of the level of service and standards to which the Association will work
- have procedures and agreed practices that are applied uniformly across the service
- re-let vacant properties as quickly as possible
- undertake repairs of vacant properties in accordance with the Association's letting standard and statutory responsibilities
- ensure that the condition of the property is of a standard that will not normally lead to an offer of accommodation being refused
- ensure that all offers of accommodation are consistent with the Association's allocations policies
- record any action taken at each stage in the void management process
- provide training to ensure that staff are equipped to carry out the roles expected of them
- keep tenants and service users informed during the void management process
- ensure that communication with tenants and service users is in plain English and makes clear in all cases who is the officer to contact in case of queries etc.

## 5 AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

5.1 **The Management Board** - has responsibility for ensuring that this policy complies with Regulatory and Legislative requirements and in meeting the Association's Business Plan and budget commitments.

5.2 **The Operations Director** – has responsibility for ensuring that appropriate support and timely advice is provided to the Management Board, Executive Management Team and relevant staff to ensure compliance with Regulatory and Legislative requirements and in meeting the Association's Business Plan and budget commitments.

## 6 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Association will ensure the promotion of equal opportunities by publishing information and documentation in different languages and other formats such as large print, tape and Braille, as required.

6.2 The Association will ensure that no individual is discriminated against on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or other personal attributes, including beliefs, or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions.

## **7 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The approach outlined in this Policy, working in tandem with our policies on Anti-Social Behaviour, Estate Management and Allocations, ensures that the Association is striving to make positive contributions towards the sustainability of our communities. The Association acknowledges the negative impact that empty homes can have on the community and aims to ensure that these are kept to a minimum.
- 7.2 The Association will use the information gathered from the inspection of empty properties, from refusals and from exit surveys on termination to inform our long term maintenance investment plans and asset management strategies and priorities.

## **8 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 8.1 The Management Board will consider the Risk Management factors of Void Management including:-
- Financial risk through potential failure to ensure that enough income is collected to cover operating costs due to excessive rent lost to voids
  - Non-compliance with the Social Housing Charter outcomes and performance indicators.

## **9 HEALTH & SAFETY**

- 9.1 The Association will ensure that staff will work in accordance with the Lone Working Policy when inspecting properties, carrying out accompanied viewings or applicant assessments as necessary.
- 9.2 The Association will ensure that all inspections and work undertaken at properties will be carried out in accordance with Health & Safety guidance and regulation.

## **10 TENANT CONSULTATION STRATEGY**

- 10.1 The Association will consult on the Void Property Management Policy and its component parts in line with its Tenant Participation Strategy.

## **11 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

- 11.1 Any tenant may submit a Complaint, using the Association's complaints procedure if it is felt that the Association has failed to correctly apply this Void Management Policy.

## **12 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

- 12.1 The Association will monitor performance on void management using both statutory and local performance indicators as follows:

## **Statutory Performance Indicators – Social Housing Charter**

- Percentage of rent due lost through properties being empty during the last year
- Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with the standard of their home when moving in
- Percentage of tenancy offers refused during the year
- Percentage of lettable houses that became vacant in the last year
- Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year, by source of let

## **Local Performance Indicators**

- The percentage turnover of stock
- The number of houses where the void period has been 6 months or more
- The average length of time to re-let properties by Local Authority area
- The average cost of repairs per void
- The number of properties refused 3 or more times, by reason
- The average number of days taken to complete void repairs

12.2 The Operations Director will have delegated authority to annually agree targets for the effective management of voids in the financial year. The statutory performance indicators will be reported quarterly to the Management Board. The remaining performance indicators will be monitored monthly by the Operations Director with exceptions to target being reported to the Executive Management Team.

## **13 POLICY REVIEW**

13.1 The Association will review the Void Management Policy in 2018. Amendments will be made as required after consultation with service users and other agencies.

## CALEDONIA SERVICE STANDARDS

### EMPTY PROPERTIES

We will .....

- Offer a pre-termination visit for all tenants within 10 days of receipt of notice to terminate
- Inspect empty properties within 2 working days of termination
- Investigate immediately abandoned or illegally occupied property
- Ensure properties are repaired quickly and effectively and meet our letting standard
- Publicise the letting standard and ensure that it is made available to new tenants and applicants
- Monitor and record the progress of the property through the void process
- Aim to re-let all properties within 15 days (provided no major works are required)
- Offer properties to new tenants before they become vacant
- Seek feedback on satisfaction with the condition of the property, recording reasons for refusals and for terminations to identify & rectify any problems
- Arrange a pre-tenancy interview, accompanied viewings and a face to face tenancy agreement sign up with the Housing Officer where appropriate
- Provide a Tenants' Information Handbook, a valid Energy Performance Certificate, Gas Safety Certificate, a Tenant Housing Information Card & heating instructions to all new tenants
- Undertake a new tenant home visit within 6 weeks of commencement of the tenancy

## CALEDONIA MINIMUM LETTING STANDARD

Caledonia Housing Association will ensure that all properties for re-letting have been subject to our standard checks for cleanliness and condition, for the integrity of all services including gas, electricity and water supply and for the proper operation of appliances for the use of water and heating

This standard has been compiled in accordance with SFHA guidelines and complies with the Social Housing Charter outcome 4: quality of housing.

All repairs detailed within Caledonia's 'Letting Standard' will be completed as a minimum before tenants move into their new home, unless we previously agree with a prospective tenant to complete specific repairs upon allocation.

Providing the highest level of satisfaction is a key aim of Caledonia and to ensure we provide a level of consistency in the standards we deliver our void properties to new tenants, we have agreed this detailed 'Letting Standard' for all our contractors and staff members to work to.

### INTERNAL WORKS

#### 1. Cleanliness

- 1.1 All Caledonia properties should be thoroughly cleaned upon completion of all repair and refurbishment works
- 1.2 All surfaces will be disinfected with particular attention given to the kitchen and bathroom areas.
- 1.3 Baths, basins and toilets will be cleaned with water running freely
- 1.4 All woodwork will be washed down
- 1.5 All windows will be cleaned and floors swept and mopped.

#### 2. Services

- 2.1 All electrical and gas services to a property will be checked for faults and general integrity.
- 2.2 All taps, wastes and overflows will be clean, be securely fixed, and be free from blockages and in full working order.
- 2.3 All gas appliances will be tested and all properties with gas must have a Gas Safety Certificate issued. A copy of this Certificate is issued to the new tenant.

#### 3. Condition of Appliances

- 3.1 All appliances such as central heating systems, showers and electric heaters should be tested as necessary and/or checked for general condition to ensure they are safe for use. Any inspection made should include an assessment of whether the appliance/installation complies with current statutory regulations.



- 3.2 If an outgoing tenant has installed a fixed appliance without a certificate, a maintenance officer will decide whether the appliance should be removed or retained and serviced.

#### **4. Security**

- 4.1 The types and extent of security fittings installed are, to some degree dependant on the position and location of a property. This decision will be made by the Maintenance Officer.
- 4.2 There will be two keys for each external door at a property and the following security locks should be fitted as a minimum

##### **For single doors:**

- Mortise lock, or
- Rim type deadlock, or
- Key operated multi-point lock

##### **For double doors (including French doors):**

- Mortise lock with 2 key operated security bolts shooting into the frame, fitted top and bottom, or
- Rim type deadlock with 2 key operated security bolts shooting into the frame, fitted top and bottom of each opening door, or
- Key operated multi-point lock

##### **For patio entrance doors:**

- Key operated multi-point lock, or
- One key operated patio door lock plus 2 key operated security bolts (fitted top and bottom of each opening door), shooting into either the frame or the door (it is likely that the 2 key operated security bolts will have been retrospectively fitted), or
- One key operated patio door lock plus an anti-theft device preventing the lifting of sliding patio doors from their frames

##### **For rear access doors:**

- Mortise lock, or
  - Rim type mortise lock, or
  - Yale lock, or
  - One or more substantial bolts secured from the inside
- 4.3 Door entry systems – front door entry and secure rear access door to all communal entrance areas
- 4.4 Common stairwells, lifts, common areas, laundry and drying areas, refuse chutes and bin stores, where provided, must be in good and safe order
- 4.5 Adequate lighting in common internal and external areas within the curtilage of the house (at entrance and every landing and passageway)

#### **5. Windows**

- 5.1 All broken and cracked panes of glass will be replaced
- 5.2 All glazing at low level or in doors will be installed with laminated glass or replaced with timber panels

5.3 Window locks will be fitted on all ground floor flats and in sheltered accommodation.

## **6. Electrical Installations**

6.1 All sockets and light fittings will be securely fixed and in good condition

6.2 All extraction units will be fully tested and operational.

## **7. Internal Doors**

7.1 All internal doors will be free from holes and in full working order

7.2 Doors will have a mortise latch with handles fitted that are fully operational and fit comfortably into the door recess.

7.3 Any new internal doors that have been fitted will leave adequate space for carpets and laminates.

## **8. Architraves and Skirting**

8.1 All architraves and skirting boards will be securely fixed to the wall and free from loose nails and screws.

8.2 Any bare, untreated timber will be supplied with a base coat.

## **9. Plastering**

9.1 All plasterwork will be repaired to walls that have defects above hairline cracks, or where plaster work is not keyed to the brickwork. Hairline cracks are considered acceptable and can be repaired with decoration.

## **10. Floor coverings**

10.1 Where carpets, laminates and floor coverings are left in the property it will be at the discretion of the housing and maintenance officer as to whether these should be removed.

10.2 Anti-slip floor coverings, where provided in sheltered, very sheltered and amenity properties, should be in good condition. Missing or broken floorboards or tiles will be replaced to match existing fittings (where possible)

10.3 All floors should be even and free from trip hazards.

10.4 Airbricks to suspended ground floor voids should be checked to ensure adequate air circulation

## **11. Redecoration**

11.1 All rooms will be in an acceptable state of decoration by either:

- Ensuring rooms are in a clean condition prepared for redecoration
- Carrying out any necessary decoration works
- Offering a prospective tenant a decoration allowance.

11.2 The acceptable standard for decoration is that walls and ceilings shall be in a good state of repair for any decoration. Minor indentations and hairline cracks will be considered an acceptable standard. All exposed surfaces to joinery and metal work shall be stained, varnished or gloss painted, free from damage and

discolouration. Minor damage such as chipping may be repaired to make acceptable providing the remainder of the paintwork is in good order.

- 11.3 The association operates a decoration allowance scheme in partnership with Dulux and has a separate Decoration Allowance Policy to determine when an allowance may be made and the value of the allowance. The allowance is a contribution towards the cost of decorating and not intended to cover all the costs involved. The allowance is valid for three months from point of sign up.

## **12. Kitchens**

- 12.1 All kitchens (space permitting) will have a minimum of the following units.

### **1 bedroom property**

- 1 x 1000 wall unit
- 1 x 1000 sink unit
- 1 x 1000 base unit

### **2 bedroom property**

- 1 x 1000 wall unit
- 1 x 1000 sink unit
- 1 x 1000 base unit
- 1 x 500 base unit

### **3 bedroom property**

- 2 x 1000 wall unit
- 1 x 1000 sink unit
- 2 x 1000 base unit
- 1 x 500 base unit
- 1 x 500 wall unit

- 12.2 In general the enclosed storage contained within, or adjacent to, the kitchen will amount to at least 1m<sup>3</sup>. This includes kitchen units and walk in storage cupboards.

- 12.3 All work surfaces will be securely fixed, be free from cracks and burns and be safe for the preparation of food. This may include the renewal of jointing and edging strips.

- 12.4 Any gas supply pipe to a cooker space will be 'capped off' by the contractor.

- 12.5 Layout and design of the kitchen should be sufficient to prevent accidents and meet Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Specifically, there should be (1) a space between the cooker and the sink, and (2) a 600mm wide x 600mm deep worktop on at least one side of the cooker

## **13. Bathrooms**

- 13.1 All properties will have the following items as a minimum

- A bath that is enclosed with a bath panel, or a walk in shower
- Toilet and toilet seat
- Wash hand basin

- 13.2 All missing and defective wall tiles will be replaced, grouted and sealed. Where the layout of the bathroom has been changed, new splash backs will be installed to the bath and wash hand basin.

13.3 Where a shower is installed tiling should be full height adjacent to the shower, with a shower rail and curtain fitted.

#### **14. Fire Protection**

14.1 All Caledonia properties where practicable will comply with all current fire regulations.

14.2 Fire doors will be fitted where practicable to comply with regulations and have automatic door closers installed ensuring the door closes mechanically.

14.3 A minimum of one battery operated smoke alarm must be provided at appropriate locations. This will be determined by the property type.

14.4 All electrical circuits should be earthed in accordance with current requirements.

14.5 Existing hard wired mains connected smoke alarms should be tested.

14.6 Where the property is linked to a fire detection system, for example in a sheltered scheme, the system will be tested by the contractor.

14.7 Polystyrene ceiling tiles will be removed as they are considered a fire risk and repairs will be made afterwards.

#### **15. Insulation/Energy Efficiency**

15.1 SAP rating of at least 50 (gas central heating) or 60 (all other heating systems)

15.2 Gas boiler with seasonal efficiency over 55%

15.3 Gas boiler or electric storage heating systems less than 20 years old

15.4 All roof spaces will be inspected prior to any new tenant moving into a Caledonia property.

15.5 All roof spaces should be insulated with at least 100mm insulation. Tanks and pipes in roof spaces should be lagged. Insulation should not prevent ventilation of any roof space. Where insulation does not meet the required standard then the property will be placed on a list of programmed works and will be carried out within an agreed timescale dependant on need and existing programmes.

15.6 All hot water cylinders will be insulated.

15.7 All hot water pipes and cold water tanks that are outwith the insulated part of the property must be separately insulated

15.8 All cavities will be adequately insulated.

#### **16. Free from damp and mould**

16.1 Mechanical ventilation in kitchens and bathrooms (where required to tackle persistent problems of dampness, condensation or mould growth, i.e. more than 5% surface area of kitchen or bathroom walls and ceilings affected)

16.2 All Caledonia properties should be free from damp and mould. All sources of damp should be thoroughly investigated and the appropriate remedial action taken prior to any new tenant moving in.

16.3 All decorations damaged as a result of treating damp and mould will be reinstated by Caledonia Housing Association

## **17. Noise Insulation**

- 17.1 Adequate noise insulation where there are problems with external noise, e.g. factories, traffic etc.

## **EXTERNAL WORKS**

External painter works and associated repairs to a property will usually be carried out as part of Caledonia's 5 year cyclical programme. The Maintenance Officer will determine whether work identified can reasonably wait until the next cyclical contract or whether more urgent work is needed. The amount and nature of the work will be taken into consideration.

## **18. Roofs**

- 18.1 All fascias, bargeboards and soffits will be secure and free from significant rot or decay and be primed with a basecoat as a minimum.
- 18.2 The roof should be in good condition, structurally sound and water tight.
- 18.3 Flashings should be in good condition and correctly dressed.

## **19. Drains and Gutters**

- 19.1 All gutters and downpipes should be free from blockages, debris and plant growth, have adequate fall settings and be free from leaks. Replacement guttering or downpipe will be UPVC plastic unless the Maintenance Officer determines this would not be in keeping with the building.
- 19.2 Gully covers will be provided to all drain heads. Manhole covers will be in good condition and securely placed.

## **20. Fences and boundaries**

- 20.1 Fences and walls forming boundaries to a Caledonia property will be stable and in good condition. Where Caledonia is responsible for a boundary, remedial works may be raised to rectify or replace any damaged part to match existing.

## **21. Communal areas**

- 21.1 All fences will be free standing, intact and gates securely closed
- 21.2 All communal glass will be free from breakage, if they are to be regularly cleaned then the tenant will be informed upon sign up
- 21.3 All entrance doors shall work automatically and close securely
- 21.4 The door entry system to the communal door will be free from faults and fully operational.
- 21.5 Lights should be in full working order and be preset at timed intervals set by the contractor.
- 21.6 Fasciae, porches and external paintwork will be included in our cyclical painting programme.
- 21.7 All signage on the exterior or interior communal area will be free from damage or graffiti
- 21.8 The bin area will have no rubbish in it except that which is contained within bins
- 21.9 Fire escapes will be kept clear from obstruction at all times.

## SHQS WORKS

The following require to be checked for compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. An element is deemed to fail if 20% of it or more requires replacement.

### 22. The Tolerable Standard

Property fails the SHQS if it fails to pass any **one** of the following requirements:

- Is structurally stable
- Is substantially free from rising or penetrative damp
- Has satisfactory provision for natural and artificial light, for ventilation and for heating
- Has an adequate piped supply of wholesome water within the house
- Has a sink provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water within the house
- Has a WC available for the exclusive use of the occupants of the house suitably located within the house
- Has a fixed bath/shower and a wash basin all with a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water suitable located within the house
- Has an effective system for the drainage and disposal of foul and surface water
- Has satisfactory facilities for the cooking of food within the house
- Has satisfactory access to all external doors and outbuildings

### 23. Primary Building Elements

Property fails the SHQS if any **one** of the following elements requires replacement of 20% or more:

- Wall structures
- Internal floor structures
- Foundations
- Roof structure

### 24. Secondary Building Elements

Property fails the SHQS if any **two** of the following elements requires replacement of 20% or more:

- Roof covering
- Chimney stacks
- Flashings
- Rainwater goods
- External wall finishes
- Access decks/balustrades
- Common access stairs/landings, pathways within the curtilage of the dwelling
- Individual dwelling balconies/verandas
- Individual dwelling attached garages, internal stairs
- Damp Proof Course
- Windows/ doors
- Common windows/rooflights
- Underground drainage