

# Voids Management

(Empty Properties)

# Policy

Document Ref:	Version:	Appro
WHA 0597	3	30.05.2

## Introduction

Warrington Housing Association's (WHA) vision is to work alongside our customers to help make Warrington a great place to live, in which the potential of individuals and communities can be realised.

## Scope

A property is classed as 'void when there is no current or 'live' tenancy running against the address.

The void period is the time between one live tenancy ending and a new tenancy commencing.

Whilst a property is void, WHA receives no rental income and may incur other costs whilst the property remains empty. Empty properties also have a negative aesthetic impact on the local community and fundamentally, while we are leaving our properties empty, we are not meeting one of our core regulatory duties in respect of tackling housing need.

It is essential that an effective and efficient system is in place to manage all void properties.

WHA is committed to ensuring that the turnover of its housing stock is effectively managed to maximise safety and rental income, meeting housing needs that contribute to positive neighbourhoods.

This policy sets out WHA's approach to void management for all WHA stock and applies to General Needs, Independent Living and Supported Living properties let and managed by WHA.

## Aims & Objectives

The objective of the Void Policy is to operate an effective void management process:

- To meet all legislative, contractual and regulatory obligations.
- To ensures value for money in repairing void properties and achieving a WHA re-let standard.
- To maximise and monitors customer satisfaction with WHA properties and gathers refusal data to analyse and inform process, budgets, and future actions.

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- To ensure that customers are aware of their obligations and that end of tenancy arrears and rechargeable repairs are prevented.
- To minimise rent loss and time taken to complete repairs and improve WHA void properties.
- Ensure productive interdepartmental working essential for an efficient and cost-effective void management process.
- To ensure that WHA rehousing applicants are allocated a property, which meets the defined re-let standard.
- To have robust procedures for the recovery of abandoned property
- To monitor and report on void performance in order to highlight strengths, actions to improve and remain in line with our Asset Management Strategy.
- To ensure that our void policies and procedures contribute to sustainable tenancies and sustainable communities

### Key Performance Indicators and targets

WHA have established a range of key performance indicators which are reviewed annually. These include measurements covering the following

- Void rent loss
- Number of properties let
- Actual and average void turnaround times
- Voids as a % of total stock

### Monitoring and Review

These indicators will be monitored internally by the association's senior management team. The information is also used to highlight areas of concern and, if appropriate, to inform discussions with teams and contractors who can contribute to the overall performance.

### Inspections and Repairs

Where notice to terminate a tenancy is received an initial 'pre termination' inspection of the property will be carried out prior to the customer vacating the property by colleagues from both the Housing and Property Services departments.

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The purpose of this inspection is to ascertain the general condition of the property and to advise the customer what is required in order to end the tenancy satisfactorily.

The meeting and discussions will cover customer obligations linked to outstanding customer related repairs, pre void paperwork and compliance checks to be completed and financial discussions such as the rent account prior to ending the tenancy.

The customer will be reminded in line with tenancy obligations, that the association may recharge for any work required due to damage or neglect by the customer once the tenancy has ended and how to work with us to avoid any unexpected charges.

When the property is vacated it will be inspected, and all statutory repairs will be actioned in addition to those tasks required to ensure that the property is at the WHA lettable standard.

WHA will ensure that all repairs are carried out promptly to agreed timescales. Occasionally, the association will take the opportunity to carry out major repairs and/or major component replacement and planned maintenance works while a property is vacant.

Non-standard fixtures carried out by or left by previous customer will be replaced and recharged to the outgoing customer as previously advised, in less there has been prior agreement by the Association.

The Association will carry out its obligations to the previous customer under the Right to Compensation for Improvements Policy where appropriate and this will be recorded alongside the previous permissions and guarantees on Home Master.

Depending on the decorative condition of the property the association may consider providing the new customer with vouchers to assist with the costs of decorating or where more suitable due to 'ability' or 'age' arrange a guided re-paint in agreed required areas in specialist or retirement properties.

In exceptional circumstances the association may carry out decoration works to the property while it is in the void stage, particularly where the condition of the property is exceptionally poor, where failure to carry out such works may have a significant impact on the lettability or if the incoming customer is/or is expected to be vulnerable.

## Death of a Customer

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Where the termination of tenancy has happened due to the death of the customer (and there is no one entitled to succeed to the tenancy) the termination date will be noted on HomeMaster as the date on which the customer died. Information ascertained from a copy of the customers Death Certificate will be used to support the correct date information on the system.

The customer's representative or legal contacts will be contacted and expectations around the notice period, how to stop utilities, clear the property and when to complete this by to avoid unplanned charges will be explained.

Where the customer's representative takes longer than the agreed notice period, the association will make a charge for loss of rent for each day beyond the initial notice.

### Customer Service Offer

In addition to the above, WHA also set clear targets linked to customer related services when a customer moves into a property.

It is imperative that customers have the opportunity to meet a Housing Officer in their new home to discuss the property at agreed time as per their tenancy agreement.

The following offer is available to customers, at their property in all cases;

- A New Tenancy Visit (NTV) should be completed with each new customer within 6 to 8 weeks of any new tenancy sign up - this meeting is always completed at the property with a representative of the WHA team. This meeting allows the customer to chat through their move in, raise further questions about the property or areas local to the property. The WHA colleague can support any rent payment questions, referrals required and/or troubleshoot any issues raised by the customer immediately offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.
- A Current Tenancy Visit (CTV) – this appointment is generally completed at a 2- or 3-year point in a standard general needs tenancy and is completed using this pattern. Customers of course can request a CTV at any time during their housing journey and often WHA colleagues will request CTVs outside of the time frame also. During these meetings the team will discuss repairs, damage or improvements to your property, ways to get involved with the organisation, rent payment questions and will be on hand to answer any queries you may have. Again, this meeting happens face to face and at your property.

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- End of Tenancy Visit (ETV) – this meeting is generally booked at the end of your housing journey with us once you have submitted notice to leave the property. The team aim to meet with you at the property within a week or two of receiving confirmation that you wish to leave. During this meeting the team will ask about the property, your experiences living there, the support given to you during your housing journey and may well discuss any repairs or damage noted and related repayment plans prior to your move.

The aim of the visits is to ensure that you get the best out of our services and the home where you have chosen to live.

The Head of Customer Services and Customer Service Manager are responsible for the delivery of appointment booking and completion of these visits including any follow-on work identified.

We have a number of properties allocated to supported housing, for which we have a service level agreement (SLA) in place with Warrington Borough Council. These properties, on void, have all compliance checks however, the void process and responsibilities are reflected in the SLA.

### Responsibility

The Board has overall governance responsibility for health and safety and compliance and ensuring the organisation complies with all relevant legislation and regulation.

The Head of Assets and Head of Housing and Customer Services will oversee the implementation of the Void Management Policy.

The Property Services Officers, Customer Experience Manager and Housing Officers will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Void Management element of this policy.

The Customer Experience Manager is responsible for providing a high quality and effective communication with customers and contractors.

### Equality Impact Assessment

In implementing this policy, we will treat all customers honestly and fairly.

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An equality impact assessment has been carried out and where customers require additional support or time, we will endeavour to provide a service that seeks to meet those needs or work with them to agree a shared positive outcome.

### WHA – Minimal Lettable Standard

- ✓ Any inspection carried out to any appliance should include an assessment of whether the appliance/installation complies with current statutory regulations.
- ✓ All electrical and gas services to the property should be checked for faults. We will certify that the services comply with all relevant industry standards and legislative standards.
- ✓ All gas appliances to be tested and all properties with gas must have a gas tightness test carried out and an appropriate certificate issued. Gas to be capped.
- ✓ All appliances such as central heating systems, storage heaters, electric showers and electric fires and convector heating should be tested as necessary to ensure they are safe to use.
- ✓ A full periodic electrical safety check will be carried out in all properties and an appropriate electrical certificate produced when tested and issued upon completion.
- ✓ If it is identified that the properties electrical system is older than the recommended 25-year life cycle a decision will be made whether to carry out a full rewire while the property is void or if is to be added to a planned program.
- ✓ Any electrical work carried out in the void should be unobtrusive.
- ✓ All sockets and lighting including their fittings should be in a reasonable condition.
- ✓ All existing ventilation and extraction units will be tested and fully operational.
- ✓ Door entry systems will be tested and fully operational.
- ✓ All properties must comply with the Decent Homes Standard so that they have efficient heating and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort and to a valid Energy Performance Certificate.
- ✓ All properties should have a fully operational heating system.
- ✓ A radiator in every room with the exception of separate WC's and hallways.
- ✓ Gas fires would normally be removed and area made good and appropriately vented.

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- ✓ All bathrooms should be in a reasonable condition and comply with the Decent Homes Standard.
- ✓ Where a bathroom exceeds its recommended lifecycle period it may be replaced once the new customer has moved into the property to ensure the new customer has the opportunity to choose the style of the new bathroom. The Property Services Officer will confirm at hand over to the Housing Department if this plan is in place.
- ✓ All kitchen and bathroom taps, waste and overflows should be clean and free from defects.
- ✓ Bathrooms should consist of, as a minimum, – Bath, Wash hand basin & W.C.
- ✓ The bathroom suite should be free from defects with no cracks or chips and baths and basins should have a plug and chain unless a pop-up waste kit is already installed
- ✓ Baths should have an enclosed panels and W.C's should have a new WC seat.
- ✓ All Kitchens should be in a reasonable state of repair and comply with the Decent Homes Standard.
- ✓ Where a kitchen has exceeded its recommended life cycle period it may be replaced once new person has moved into the property to ensure the new customer has the opportunity to choose the colours & styles of the new kitchen. The Property Services Officer will confirm at hand over to the Housing Department if this is the plan in place.
- ✓ All kitchen units should be of an adequate size and all doors and drawers should be in a reasonable working order and free from defects, should any of the above require replacing then it must be noted on the void inspection sheet of the recharges.
- ✓ Worktops will be free from defects and will be finished with suitable edging strips any worktops that require replacing due to knife cuts or burns must be identified on the void inspection sheet as a recharge to the outgoing customer.
- ✓ Internal doors should be free from damage and defects and open and close freely with sufficient handles and latch, if a door requires replacing due to customer damage it should be noted on the void inspection sheet as a recharge to the outgoing customer.
- ✓ There should be an internal door leading from the kitchen leading to other rooms unless open plan.
- ✓ Any new internal door fitted should leave adequate space for floor covering.

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- ✓ A new internal door may have to be a fire door, this must be recorded, and certificate of conformity provided to Property Services.
- ✓ There will be no internal glazed doors unless the glazing is laminated.
- ✓ All architrave and skirting boards will be secured and free from defects.
- ✓ Any damaged architraves, skirting boards, and door casings will be replaced and primed.
- ✓ Holes in plasterwork will be filled and prepared for decoration.
- ✓ Defected plasterwork or blown plaster will be rectified while the property is void; however uneven walls in older stock are deemed acceptable if they are free from significant cracking and can be decorated.
- ✓ All glazing that shows signs of condensation will be replaced (In certain circumstances these can be replaced once a new customer has moved into the property and should not hold up the void process).
- ✓ Any glazing units broken or cracked will be replaced while the property is void.
- ✓ Opening windows must be free and easy to operate, keys must be supplied for lockable window handles (minimum 2 keys for each property) if applicable window restrictors must be installed/replaced.
- ✓ Any glazing at low level or in doors will be laminated.
- ✓ External doors should be undamaged and free from defect.
- ✓ All Composite and UPVC doors must have as a minimum a multipoint locking system and security cylinder or 5 lever mortise lock or the equivalent for home insurance.
- ✓ Timber front doors must have a minimum of two locks consisting of a night latch and a mortice lock with a minimum of 5 levers.
- ✓ Timber rear doors must have a 5-lever mortise lock and handles.
- ✓ Front doors that are fitted to flats that open out to a communal area must have a suitably approved door closer and letter plate fitted.
- ✓ All previously fitted carpets and laminate flooring will be removed (unless the flooring is of a good standard and the incoming tenant would benefit from the floor covering remaining in situ)
- ✓ There will be no laminate flooring left in first floor flats and above.
- ✓ Gripper rods and door trims can be left in situ once inspected for quality.
- ✓ Any kitchen or bathroom flooring identified as being installed as part of the planned program shall be free from defects.

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- ✓ Cracked or chipped ceramic floor tiling will be replaced with vinyl floor covering.
- ✓ Carpet tiles in retirement or age friendly schemes will be patch repaired unless the Property Services Officer deems it necessary to replace the flooring completely.
- ✓ All roof spaces should be checked, and items recorded on the void inspection sheet as a rechargeable cost to the outgoing customer - the belongings will then be cleared of former customer's belongings.
- ✓ All properties shall be free from damp and mould growth. Any areas of damp must be notified to the Property Services Officer for further investigation and appropriate remedial action will be taken prior to viewings or re-let.
- ✓ Any evidence of mould growth should be thoroughly washed down, treated and made good.
- ✓ Gutters and downspouts should be free from blockages and leaks.
- ✓ Gulley covers will be provided, and manhole covers should be in good condition and secure.
- ✓ Garages and outhouses will be checked, and items recorded on the void inspection sheet as a rechargeable cost to the outgoing customer - the belongings will then be cleared, and general defects or remedial repairs carried out.
- ✓ Timber sheds left by the previous customer will remain in situ if in reasonable condition and will be gifted to the incoming customer. WHA will have no responsibility for emptying or repairing them.
- ✓ Any unsafe timber sheds will be removed from the property and disposed of - where relevant a recharge may be applied for removal to the outgoing customer.
- ✓ Fences and walls must be secure and safe, where a fence is safe and the responsibility of WHA to repair it may be included in a cyclical replacement program - please note that WHA is not responsible for replacing all fences linked to WHA properties. This will be explained to all incoming WHA customers on viewing and noted as explained at sign up on the HomeMaster system.
- ✓ All timber gates shall be secure and must have a latch or secured by a bolt but not a padlock
- ✓ Ponds shall be filled in or removed to ensure the safety of incoming customers.

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- ✓ All work surfaces should be disinfected, kitchens and bathrooms using clean hot water where possible.
- ✓ All windows should be cleaned externally.
- ✓ All floors shall be swept and disinfected.
- ✓ Any utility items including white goods shall be cleaned (property type relevant).
- ✓ If the principal contractor identifies resident damage, then this must be reported on the void inspection form immediately. This information will then be passed to the customer service department to ensure swift contact is made with any outgoing customers.
- ✓ All properties will be thoroughly cleaned when the void work has been completed and this will be the final task when signing off.

### Void Property Repairs

In order to be efficient, at the time of void notification each void property will be issued as category A. Once inspected it can be re categorised and fall into one of the following category types, it should be noted that the contractor would be given a set target days for the completion of the void repairs it may not necessarily be the set number of days shown for each category shown. Our overall target for reletting a property will be agreed with Board annually. Our voids process will reflect the timescales for each stage of the void phase dependent on the agreed target.

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- Void category and timescales

Category	Details	Work Content
A	Minor repairs 0-7 days	Safety Checks - Minor Works, window handles, door handles, locks, toilet seats - General Clear & Clean
B	Minor repairs 7-13 days	Safety Checks - Minor Works - General Clear & Clean including skip. Minor works - Kitchen cupboard doors - bath panel - Internal doors - and where ACM removal is not required.
C	Major repairs 14-21 days,	Safety Checks - Minor Works - General Clear & Clean. As <i>B</i> but includes where ACM removal is required.
D	Major repair works making the property un-lettable - Property Appraisal may be required	Property Appraisal - Major works including Electrical rewire. Kitchen/Bathroom Replacement. Replacement Roof. DPC. Structural Repairs

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## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

An equality impact assessment has been carried out and this process has demonstrated that there are no negative impacts on any group as identified by the Equality Act.

## RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- WHA Transfer Policy
- WHA Allocation Policy
- WHA Downsizing Procedure
- WHA Equal opportunities Policy
- WHA local letting policy

## ASSOCIATED LEGISLATION

- Building Regulations Act 1984
- Construction Act 1996
- Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Decent Homes Standard 2006
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- RSH consumer standards 2024

## RESPONSIBILITY

The Head of Assets is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

This policy and its delivery will be reviewed using data from tenant feedback surveys with support from WHASP and WHA Customer Champions on a timely basis

## MONITORING AND REVIEW

The policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if required by statutory, regulatory or best practice changes.

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