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| <b>HORIZON HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED</b> | <b>HOUSING SERVICES POLICY</b> |
| <b>TITLE</b>                               | <b>VOID MANAGEMENT</b>         |
| <b>DATE OF APPROVAL</b>                    | <b>SEPTEMBER 2007</b>          |
| <b>DATE OF NEXT REVIEW</b>                 | <b>SEPTEMBER 2010</b>          |

## **1.0 AIM**

The aim of this policy is to ensure an efficient and customer focused service in relation to new lets and relets. We aim to minimise the void period so as to reduce rent loss and maximise rental income. In addition, we are aware of the effect voids can have on the estate and will act quickly to avoid areas becoming undesirable.

We will ensure efficiencies through:

- i.) Reducing costs on void works that are not adding value e.g. offer decoration allowances, thus reducing cost, giving tenants choice and reduce the overall void time, we will only ask those whom, in our opinion, are able to organise the works.
- ii.) Joint working, therefore avoiding departmental issues. The overall target for voids is a target set for the Housing Services Department.
- iii.) Attend viewings with tenants at mutually convenient times and allow immediate sign up

## **2.0 PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

**2.1** We have checked our policy and procedure against the performance standards.

**2.2** Performance standards for social landlords were revised by Communities Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations in November 2006. In establishing our policy we believe we are contributing to the following guiding standards:

GS1.2 **Policies and Procedures:** we have high quality written policies and procedures to guide our actions.

GS1.3 **Commitment to continuous improvement:** we actively strive for continuous improvement in all we do.

GS1.4. **Resource Management:** we make the best use of our people and our physical resources to achieve efficiency, best value, continuous improvement and to deliver high-quality services that meet the needs of our service users.

GS 1.5 **Responsiveness to service users:** we place the people who want to use our services at the heart of our work. We treat people with respect and are responsive to their views and priorities.

**2.3** Similarly, the activity standards that apply are as follows:

- AS 1.1 **Access to housing:** We ensure that people have fair and open access to our housing list and assessment process. We work with others to maximise and simplify access routes into our housing.
- AS 1.2 **Lettings:** We let houses in a way that gives reasonable preference to those in greatest housing need; makes best use of available stock; maximise choice and helps to sustain communities.
- AS 1.5 **Void Management:** We monitor demand for our houses and maximise the use of available housing, keeping empty properties and spaces in our shared accommodation to a minimum. We make sure our properties are of an appropriate lettable standard.

## **2.4 Summary**

Compliance with these standards is supported by demonstrating we are:

- i.) Seeking tenants views and acting on them.
- ii.) Being mindful of their priorities.
- iii.) Reviewing systems.
- iv.) Rewarding good practice.
- v.) Keeping tenants involved on an annual basis on our performance in relation to voids.
- vi.) Reducing void times.
- vii.) Keeping the environment in good order.
- viii.) Keeping our houses in a condition which equals or exceeds the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

## **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

**3.1** The policy objectives are to:

- i.) Comply with legal requirements
- ii.) Provide an efficient service.
- iii.) Provide a customer focussed service.
- iv.) Ensure the Void Management Policy ties in with the Allocations Policy.
- v.) Minimise the void period, thereby minimise rent loss and maximise income.
- vi.) Ensure that the standard of properties meet the expectations of our customers.
- vii.) Reward those tenants who assist us to achieve these objectives.
- viii.) Pursue those tenants who fail in their end of tenancy obligations.

### **i) Comply with Legal Requirements**

To ensure that we are complying with our legal obligations we will only let housing that is:

- wind and watertight.
- fit for habitation
- follow the terms of our tenancy agreement
- inspect gas appliances and carry out safety checks providing copies to the new tenant within 28 days
- comply with CDM regulations if repair work was so severe to demand a large contract.

The Association will include void management through its risk assessments.

Periodically, the Association will be subject to Communities Scotland Inspections, during which our performance and approach to void management will be assessed..

In addition, the Association will instruct external audit relevant to void management within its 5 year planning cycle of inspections.

## **ii) Efficiency**

To ensure that we provide an efficient service we aim to have nomination arrangements with each local authority with whom we operate. We will also review our housing list on at least an annual basis to ensure that all those on the list are actively seeking rehousing.

Properties will be inspected and work actioned as per the targets set out in our Business Plan. Monitoring of performance of both staff and contractors will be carried out to ensure efficiency.

Staff will utilise standard forms and there will be sufficient training to allow any housing services staff member to carry out inspections.

Tenants must give one month's notice in writing if they wish to terminate their tenancy. This will be enforced unless it is not reasonable to do so.

Properties will be pre allocated wherever possible and pre termination inspections will be carried out wherever possible.

## **iii) Customer Focus**

It is essential that our customers are satisfied with the services we provide.

In order to ensure this we will provide a flexible and responsive service.

Wherever possible we will visit tenants at a time which fits in with their lifestyle. We will respond to enquiries promptly and monitor levels of satisfaction.

New tenants will receive an information pack on their house. Prospective tenants will be met at the property by a Housing Services staff member at the initial viewing and again at sign up.

We will carry out follow up visits to measure the tenant satisfaction and ensure we are meeting expectations.

We will monitor complaints and report annually to Management Committee.

If the tenant has carried out improvements which have our permission and consents we will assess the condition and calculate payments based on our Rights to Compensation for Improvements Policy. This additional amenity will be added to the rental calculation for subsequent lets as per our rental policy.

#### **iv) Voids and Allocations**

Our allocations procedures, in conjunction with our Voids Procedure, will allow us to minimise void periods and loss of income for the Association. We will ensure that one procedure does not contradict the other, but work together to ensure a smooth transition from one tenancy to the next. Our commitment to Equal Opportunities will be incorporated into all policies and procedures.

When a new property let is made available and this is subject to a management agreement we will aim to incorporate a right to recover costs from those who held the nomination right.

i.e. a property being held for a tenant who is unable to move in due to support not being in place and the nomination is still required.

#### **v) Minimise Void Period and Maximise Income**

It is essential that we minimise rent loss through minimising void periods. Similarly an empty house generates no income and it is therefore imperative that we turnaround vacant homes quickly.

We will do this by ensuring that procedures encourage efficiency, set challenging timescales and adopt a flexible approach.

We will maximise the use of computer software and monitor performance quarterly. We will report to our housing service sub committee on our performance.

#### **vi) Standards That Meet Expectations**

We will carry out void property inspections at both pre termination

and post termination. The inspections will identify works required to bring the property to a lettable standard. Internal decoration will be of a reasonable standard or decoration vouchers will be offered if appropriate to do so. In all instances safety checks will be carried out. Reference should be made to the Decoration Allowance Procedure for amounts.

We will seek the views of our customers in order to assess levels of satisfaction and opinions regarding our standards. This will be done at sign up, follow up visits and at the end of a tenancy, whenever possible.

We will maintain garden areas during void periods. We will keep our stock in good condition and aim to make it desirable.

#### **vii) Rewards**

- We will aim to reward those tenants who have conducted their tenancy in an excellent manner. This will include those tenants who have facilitated the requests of staff prior to termination date.
- Should a tenant allow us access prior to their tenancy end date, acknowledge our instructions on what they must do and then confirm that all works have been attended, as well as return the keys on time. We would determine their eligibility and reward in recognition of their co-operation.

In such instances as listed above, the Association can be assured of receiving a property with the minimum of work and also plan the next sign up.

We will set parameters for the rewards scheme. This will be funded from the void budget.

We will pursue those tenants who fail in their end of tenancy obligations for any amounts outstanding in arrears or for repairs through our debt recovery process.

#### **4.0 REVIEW**

As part of the business plan, this policy will be reviewed three-yearly and committee approval sought. The void targets set out within the business plan will be reviewed annually.

The Housing Services sub-committee will receive reports quarterly on performance against targets.

This policy will be implemented through the void management procedure and in conjunction with the allocations policy and our abandonment and repossession procedures.

We will assess our own performance against the other national

RSL's via the Annual Performance and Statistical Returns (APSR) each year. This will allow us to compare performance within an RSL peer group.

Our quarterly monitoring will also show our cumulative performance so that trends and patterns can be identified and actioned.

We will contribute to SCORE and participate in the analysis of performance.

Through nomination agreements we will issue reviews and returns to local authorities.

## **5.0**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1** That Housing Sub Committee approve the appended policy as prepared by the Housing Services team.
- 2** That the policy be reviewed in 3 years unless required sooner.