

Voids Policy



Our Neighbourhood Service
Warrington Housing Association

Introduction

Warrington Housing Associations (WHA) vision is 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 or empty property' 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.

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 ensure value for money in repairing void properties and achieving a WHA re-let standard.
- To maximise and monitor customer satisfaction with WHA properties and gather refusal data to analyse and inform process, budgets, and future actions.
- 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.

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- 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 shall be carried out prior to the customer vacating the property by colleagues from both the Housing and Property Services departments.

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

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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 and within the void period, 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.

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 and where failure to carry out such works may have a significant impact on the let-ability of the property going forward.

Death of a Customer

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.

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Where the customers' 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.

Responsibility

- 24.1 The Board has overall governance responsibility for health and safety and compliance and ensuring the organisation complies with all relevant legislation and regulation.
- 24.2 The Head of Assets and Head of Customer Services will oversee the implementation of the Void Management Policy.
- 24.3 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.
- 24.4 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.

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.

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- ✓ 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 installed by previous customers will be removed and area made good and appropriately vented.
- ✓ Gas fires installed by WHA will be removed and the area made good and appropriately vented.
- ✓ 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 new person 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.

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- ✓ 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, should any of the above require replacing then it must be noted on the void inspection sheet of the recharges.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.

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- ✓ 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 mortise 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.

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- ✓ 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 – where relevant a recharge may be applied for removal to the outgoing customer.
- ✓ 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).

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- ✓ 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.

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

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