

Void Policy

Purpose and Scope

This policy deals with the arrangements to process empty properties managed on behalf of the Council, and properties owned directly by BHP. The standards do not apply to short life and temporary accommodation schemes.

Policy Aims and Objectives

BHP seeks to ensure that tenants are offered safe and well maintained homes to live in. The overall aim of this policy is to ensure that empty properties are repaired to an agreed standard within target timescales, to ensure value for money and speedy reletting.

A key objective is to minimise and control void costs, and BHP will aim to:

- Carry out pre-void visits to ensure that properties are being left in a clean and safe condition, and will be free from the outgoing tenant's possessions and rubbish on vacation
- Recharge the costs of any damage caused by the outgoing tenant, members of their household, or visitors
- Carry out work to an agreed letting standard and meet statutory and regulatory requirements and good practice standards
- Relet properties as quickly as possible to contain void rent loss
- Monitor the time taken on works, and lettings, including the outcome of offers, within the total void turnaround time
- Reduce the environmental impact that long term empty homes have on the quality of life of local residents.

Definitions

Void

An empty property awaiting reletting.

True void

An empty property being offered to the council for letting under the nominations agreement, net of any properties held by BHP for direct letting to its own internal transfers, or decants.

Letting standard

The minimum standard for cleaning and repairs offered to new tenants.

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Decent Homes

The minimum standard that all social housing in England must reach by 2010. The standard includes provision for health and safety, comfort, energy efficiency, standard of repair and modern facilities.

HHSR system (HHSRS)

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is the risk assessment procedure for residential properties. It replaced the Housing Fitness regime on 6th April 2006 in England. HHSRS also replaced the Fitness Standard as an element of the Decent Homes standard. To be decent, all homes must be free of category 1 hazards.

Major Works

Works to prepare void properties for reletting which include items such as the replacement of installations including kitchens, bathrooms, windows, central heating and/or structural work, or extensive dry rot/wet rot treatment.

Warm Homes Standard

The government's vision for housing includes the achievement of a warm homes standard which requires:

- Every home having loft and cavity wall insulation by 2015
- Every home having a smart meter and display to help households manage their energy use more efficiently

The approach to implementation will continue from, and build on, the existing Carbon Emission Reduction Target programme from 2012.

Void turnaround

Is the time period measured in calendar days from the date the tenancy ends to the date of the next letting.

Content

Tenancy termination and surrender

Void properties can be identified in a variety of ways, including abandonment or evictions. Notice of termination of the tenancy should be made in writing giving the notice period set out in the tenancy agreement. Exceptions may be agreed by a Director or Head of Service in circumstances where the tenant has died, or moved as a transfer to another social landlord, to avoid extra/two rents being charged.

Pre-void Inspection

Wherever possible, a pre-void inspection visit will be made. The purpose of this visit is to ensure that the tenant is aware of their responsibility for:

- Paying rent due up to the date of termination of the tenancy
- Prompt return of keys
- Clearing their goods and possessions, and any rubbish

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- Leaving the property its fixtures and fittings, and any furniture, white goods, carpets and curtains provided by BHP, clean and in good condition
- Paying the cost of any damage that does not relate to fair wear and tear
- Ensuring that meters are read and arrangements made to pay final utility bills

Market and intermediate rent only:

- Paying for the inventory checkout and void cleaning
- Agreeing arrangements for the return of the deposit

Removal of goods

BHP will not accept responsibility for any items left at the property by the outgoing tenant. Any furniture or possessions left in void properties will be cleared, stored and disposed of in accordance with current procedures.

Letting Standard

BHP will publish and comply with a letting standard to ensure that all properties meet a minimum standard before letting. The standard will vary to meet the requirements of each tenure type, and will comply with all current legislation relating to structural stability, asbestos removal, repair, freedom from damp, lighting, heating, ventilation, sanitation, drainage, and fire safety at the point of letting.

Furniture and cleaning

Any furniture provided as part of the tenancy, or where a furniture package is 'gifted' to the new tenant as part of the letting, will comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations. Market and intermediate rented tenants are expected to look after the furniture, carpets and curtains provided to them during their tenancy, allowing for fair wear and tear, and will be expected to pay the reasonable cost of cleaning at the end of the tenancy.

Decoration

BHP will decorate market and intermediate rented homes if this is required for reletting. Affordable rented homes will be assessed when empty to decide whether any decoration is required, and vouchers will be provided towards the cost of labour and materials, unless the new tenant is eligible for decoration to be done by BHP.

Compensation for improvements

Tenants who have a contractual commitment in their tenancy agreement may be entitled to compensation, where they have carried out certain types of improvement with written permission to an agreed standard. Payments are calculated using a formula which takes account of depreciation.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

All void properties will be inspected with regard to the HHSRS in order to identify any risks, and ensure that category one rated risks are eliminated.

Safety Certification

All properties with a gas supply will be inspected by a Gas Safe registered contractor, to provide valid safety certification.

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The electrical installation will be checked visually and tested by a NICEIC qualified electrical contractor and a Domestic Electrical Installation Periodic Inspection Report will be provided, or (if rewired) a NICEIC Domestic Electrical Installation Certificate

Energy Performance Certification

Energy performance certificates will be provided by a suitably qualified assessor.

Aids and Adaptations

Aids and adaptations installed by the former tenant will be retained where they are in good condition and may be of benefit in reletting the property, or they form part of the fixtures and fittings for a property designated as mobility or wheelchair standard.

Non-standard fixtures

Non-standard fixtures and fittings installed by the former tenant, for example, ceiling fans and showers will be removed.

Major works

Voids inspected and designated as major works voids, will be discounted from the day to day lettings performance figures.

Asset register and stock condition

On completion of void work any improvements will be recorded on the asset register to feed into future planned maintenance programmes.

Performance

BHP will monitor its performance in managing void properties including the following performance indicators:

- Rent loss arising from voids as a percentage of rent receivable
- The proportion of homes vacant but available for letting as a percentage of the total homes managed
- The average time taken to relet homes which are empty but ready for reletting (including those requiring minor repairs)
- Expenditure against budget
- Average void cost

Accountability

All Heads of Service and senior managers are responsible for the implementation of this policy within their specific service areas.

References

Tenancy agreements
Letting standard
Landlord & Tenant Act 1985
Housing Act 1985

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Defective Premises Act 1972
Environmental Protection Act 1990
Commonhold & Leasehold Reform Act 2002
Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
Building Regulations Act 1984
Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 (CAW)
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999

Review

The Voids policy will be kept under regular review in line with changes in good practice and to take account of changes in the law. The policy will be reviewed at least every two years.

The Voids policy will require approval of the BHP Board.

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