



Void Management Policy

Policy Number

POL12

Purpose of Policy

To maximise occupation of the housing stock and offer good quality homes through existing budgetary resources. To effectively contribute to the implementation of Derwentside Homes' Selection, Allocation and Transfer Policy. To create balanced and sustainable communities by contributing to wider regeneration initiatives throughout the District. To meet agreed customer service standards and expectations consistent with the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance and relevant good practice.

How the Policy will be Implemented

Derwentside Homes will ensure that this policy is implemented through a number of agreed performance monitoring measures and will achieve continuous improvement through the use of customer satisfaction surveys and questionnaires.

Performance Measures

- BV74 - Tenant satisfaction with overall service provided by the landlord;
- BVPI 212 - Average time to re-let properties;
- Local V2 - % of rent lost through empty properties;
- Local V5 - Number of vacant dwellings empty for over 6 months;
- Local 11 - % of voids completed within timescales;
- Local 11a - % of void works over £500 completed within timescales.

Responsible Officer
Policy Author(s)
Date Approved by the Shadow Board

Frequency of Review

Three years or as dictated by legislation/guidance

Review Date

File Reference

Consultees

Tenants Forum
Staff
Management Team
Derwentside Homes Shadow Board

Void Management policy

1 Statement of Intent

- 1.1 In order to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction, Derwentside Homes will ensure that all its properties are let to a high standard known as the Derwentside Homes Lettability Standard.
- 1.2 Derwentside Homes will ensure that all its properties are let in a secure and safe condition.
- 1.3 Derwentside Homes is committed to working in partnership with contractors and other agencies to reduce the average length of time that properties are empty.
- 1.4 Derwentside Homes will contribute to financial viability by minimising rent loss of empty properties through improvements in performance.

2 Outline of Service

- 2.1 Derwentside Homes will adopt rigorous processes to ensure the efficient and effective management of empty homes by embracing examples of good practice, feedback from service reviews and performance management measures in providing a service, which represents value for money and high levels of customer satisfaction. This will be achieved by:
 - Effective communication with stakeholders and service users;
 - Implementing best practice via networking, benchmarking, guidance and collaboration with other service providers;
 - Continual evaluation of existing procedures and practices as part of our business planning process;
 - Introduction of performance indicators to measure targets, standards and outcomes.

3 Receiving Notice and Pre-Termination Inspection

- 3.1 Where practicable Derwentside Homes will carry out inspections to properties within the notice period to ensure that the process for managing void properties is:
 - Appropriate to individual circumstances; and
 - Enables early advice and information to be provided to outgoing tenants on their obligations under the tenancy agreement and the remedies available to DH to recover any outstanding debts.
- 3.2 Before the notice to end a tenancy expires Derwentside Homes will arrange for an inspection to be carried out. The purpose of the inspection is to identify the general condition of the property, any remedial work required, special features, rechargeable repairs or compensation for approved improvements where appropriate.

- 3.3 In addition, Derwentside Homes will ensure that the outgoing tenant is made aware of their tenancy obligations particularly in respect of the payment of any outstanding rent and/or other debts and the need to hand their keys in to the local Housing Office before 12 noon on the termination date.
- 3.4 Where a sole tenant has died notice is required and rent continues to be payable until notice has been given by the deceased's relatives, or the property has been cleared and the keys have been returned (whichever is the earlier) by the deceased's relatives.

4 Pre-Allocation

- 4.1 In order to improve the process for managing void properties, reduce revenue loss to the organisation and increase customer satisfaction, Derwentside Homes will introduce a system for the pre-allocation of properties within the notice period where notice has been received to end a tenancy. This includes:
- Identifying and contacting suitable applicants at an early stage to establish whether they would be interested in the tenancy of a property;
 - Considering applicant support needs where appropriate, for example, people with disabilities, mental health needs;
 - Liaising with other agencies as appropriate such as social services, health authority and supported housing when letting appropriate accommodation.
- 4.2 Derwentside Homes will make every effort to match available homes to individual choice needs and circumstances.

5 Post Termination

- 5.1 Derwentside Homes will ensure that at the post termination inspection stage focus will be placed on the following criteria:
- Property security;
 - Reinstatement work **to the Derwentside Homes lettable standard** including identification of rechargeable items and non-standard features;
 - Performance monitoring of the approved contractor for cost and quality.
- 5.2 In carrying out the criteria outlined in 5.1, Derwentside Homes will prioritise reinstatement work in accordance with the voids procedure.
- 5.3 Where major repairs to void properties are identified, Derwentside Homes will commission works to proceed in accordance with the guidelines contained within its asset management policy, to ensure value for money and achieve the Derwentside Homes Lettability Standard.
- 5.4 Derwentside Homes will ensure that throughout the period when a property is void that all external areas, including gardens, are maintained to a satisfactory standard and that regular checks are carried out to maintain the integrity and security of the property.

- 5.5 Derwentside Homes is committed to ensuring the health and safety of its staff and tenants and will implement measures in the voids process to eliminate injuries caused by, for example, needle stick hazards, faulty electrical and gas installations, and asbestos.
- 5.6 Derwentside Homes will ensure that staff are competent in carrying out work relating to this policy and have access to appropriate equipment, clothing and training.

6 Accompanied Viewing

- 6.1 Where a suitable applicant has been offered accommodation Derwentside Homes will arrange for an accompanied viewing to be undertaken. The objective of this is to:
- Offer advice in relation to the property and the neighbourhood;
 - Negotiate additional repairs or other incentives for the applicant to accept the property;
 - Identify any support or assistance which may be required, for example, Home;
 - Advise the tenant of his/her and the landlord's obligations;
 - Establish the preferred option of the prospective tenant in respect of any non-standard fittings;
 - Advise the tenant of any future planned maintenance and/or major schemes of work;
 - Advise the tenant of any community led initiatives, for example, tenants' associations or community groups;
 - Inform the prospective tenant about the Careline service;
 - Ensure that, in the case of sheltered housing, the scheme meets the prospective tenant's needs and that, where relevant, those needs can be managed by the use of supporting agencies;
 - Any other relevant information to help the prospective tenant to make a decision on whether to accept the tenancy;
 - Document any reason for refusal which will help ascertain improvements required should the property be refused more than five times.
- 6.2 Where a tenant refuses a property, the reason for refusal will be documented.

7 Signing Up

- 7.1 At the signing-up stage Derwentside Homes will ensure that all tenants are provided with a Housing Information Welcome Pack which contains advice and information about housing services, contact details, application forms for housing and council tax benefit and other helpful information, such as details about local tenants associations and the average cost of running a household.
- 7.2 Wherever possible Derwentside Homes will endeavour to meet the needs of vulnerable and older people through a number of support services, including partnerships with voluntary agencies, in helping tenants in moving to their new home, for example, the Supported Housing Service, Sure Start, Home Relocator Service, and Gardening.

- 7.3 Staff will outline to new tenants their obligations under the tenancy agreement and will agree and organise with them a suitable method and frequency of rent payment. Staff will also provide to tenants copies of up to date safety certificates.
- 7.4 Where a new tenant will be signing a Starter Tenancy Agreement they will also be required to sign a pre-tenancy commitment form which indicates that they understand their obligations to Derwentside Homes and their community in respect of their behaviour and general tenancy management.

8 Post Tenancy Visits

- 8.1 As part of Derwentside Homes commitment to high quality customer care, it will arrange for a follow up visit to be made to new tenants within 20 working days of the tenancy commencement date, and thereafter annually, to discuss the tenant's satisfaction with their home and the neighbourhood in which they live and identify any outstanding issues. This information will be used for performance management purposes to make service improvements where required.

Derwentside Homes will monitor starter tenancies in line with The Housing Corporation's Good Practice Guide to Starter Tenancies for Registered Social Landlords (November 1999) and carry out at least two reviews during the starter period.

The first tenancy review is recommended to be carried out within one month of the tenancy commencing. The review will consider:-

- any problems with claiming Housing Benefit;
- any outstanding repairs needed or any problems with repairs;
- any problems paying rent;
- the conduct of the tenancy;
- any damage to the home;
- advice and information about local community organisations and other links with local resident groups.

The second (optional) review is recommended to be carried out at the end of month six. This review should consider:-

- how settled the tenant feels in the area;
- any problems or disputes with neighbours;
- any outstanding problems with claiming Housing Benefit;
- if the tenant is in arrears, any problems with sticking to the repayment schedule;

- reviewing any previous problems encountered relating to the conduct of the tenancy;
- any damage to the home.

The third review (or second where the optional review is not carried out) is carried out approximately three months before the end of the starter period. This review should consider:-

- how the tenancy has been conducted;
- the tenant's rent payment record;
- how any problems or issues have been resolved;
- any outstanding problems with the tenant's conduct;
- any outstanding damage to the home that has not been rectified;
- what will happen next.

9 Specific Needs

- 9.1 Derwentside Homes will take into account the specific needs, which may arise, of vulnerable people, people with disabilities, and Black and Minority Ethnic groups, in a manner that promotes equality and inclusiveness, meeting the requirements of the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance.

10 Consultation

- 10.1 Derwentside Homes will seek the views of tenants on its policy for Voids Management in a variety of different ways including Service Review Groups

11 Implementation

- 11.1 The Board and Chief Executive of Derwentside Homes are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- 11.2 It is the responsibility of all employees and those working on behalf of Derwentside Homes to ensure that work is carried out in line with this policy and any related procedures.

12 Monitoring

- 12.1 The Board of Derwentside Homes will receive regular monitoring reports to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in meeting agreed performance targets and customer expectations.
- 12.2 Derwentside Homes will undertake surveys to monitor the satisfaction of its tenants with the service provided and will publish the results.

13 Review

- 13.1 Three years or as dictated by legislation/guidance.
- 13.2 Derwentside Homes will constantly review service provision and will undertake regular reviews of this policy to ensure that voids management is dealt with effectively.

14 Legislation and Other Documents

- 14.1 Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
Landlord and Tenant Act 1987.
The Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1998.
BS 7671 IEE Wiring Regulations.
Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002.
Voids Procedure.
Housing Corporation Regulatory Code and Guidance.
Derwentside Homes Selection, Allocation and Transfer Policy.
Housing Act 1996 Section 9.
Housing Act 1988 Section 133.