

Plymouth Community Homes



Void Management Policy

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

- **Purpose**

Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) is committed to reducing homelessness and meeting housing need through maximising the use and occupation of our homes, and the effective turn around of empty properties and are let in a condition that meets customers expectations.

This policy outlines how PCH intends to provide high quality homes and sustainable lettings by delivering a cost efficient void management service.

- **Definition**

A '**void**' property can be defined as a property, which does not have a legitimate tenant or is occupied by squatters/unauthorised occupants.

'**Contractor/s**' in this policy refers to both the Internal PCH repairs and voids departments and external contractors.

- **Policy**

Details of the process and practical implementation of the policy are contained in supporting procedures.

Policy Contents:

1. Tenancy Termination
2. Security;
3. Void Repairs;
4. Letting Standards;
5. New Tenancies.
6. Equality and Diversity
7. Review and Monitoring

1. Tenancy Termination

1.1 All tenants are required to give written notice to vacate their property.

1.2 Four weeks notice is required. In circumstances (such as death of tenant) the four weeks notice is waived. Please see Tenancy Termination procedure for details.

1.3 When a valid notice is received, all outgoing tenants will be advised of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy. PCH will also arrange inspection of the property prior to the tenancy ending to:

- Agree any improvements (made by the tenant) which are eligible for compensation;
- Identify any rechargeable repairs;
- Identify and notify maintenance contractors of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning;

- Identify any factors which should be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, such as special adaptations.
- Identify repairs that the tenant may be able to carry out before they leave, for example, redecoration, clearing gardens.

1.4 PCH actively encourages tenants to leave the property, garage and garden areas in a clean and tidy condition, allow minor repairs to be carried out and return keys on or before the notice expiry date. The outgoing tenant will be responsible for the full costs for clearing out the property or other rechargeable repairs if applicable..

1.5 Where a tenant hands in the keys prior to the termination of the Notice to Quit, PCH will accept this as surrender by mutual agreement. Void property procedures will be implemented immediately on receipt of the keys to enable the property to be re-let as soon as possible.

1.6 Where the keys are not returned, the cost of gaining access to change locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant.

1.7 Where PCH suspects a property to be abandoned, the statutory procedures will be followed as detailed in our tenancy management policy and procedures.

1.8 We will adopt a process that achieves the appropriate balance between speed of turnaround, cost and satisfaction and that process will be under constant review.

1.9 PCH will operate a cash incentive scheme. Tenants will be eligible for a cash payment provided the property is in good condition and they fully cooperate with the termination process. Details of the scheme will be agreed with appropriate active residents and publicized widely. The value for money of any such scheme will be tested periodically.

2. Security

2.1 Wherever possible, PCH will aim to introduce minimal and non-intrusive security on its void properties, using a risk management approach to determine the appropriate level of security.

1.2 Where there is a high risk of squatting, break-in and or vandalism, appropriate security measures will be ordered, which will protect the property whilst not adversely affecting neighbourhoods.

3. Void repairs

3.1 PCH aim to identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible. All repairs will be completed to the PCH letting standard, whilst ensuring void costs are kept to a minimum. All properties will be issued with electrical and gas safety certificates in compliance with legal requirements.

3.2 Repairs will be classified into two categories:

- Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty (including safety checks); and/or
- Non-essential or minor repairs that can be completed once the new tenant has moved into the property.

3.3 PCH will take account of the prospective tenant's preferences and

choice when ordering repairs. Giving consideration to:

- The prospective tenant's views in determining repairs to be completed while the property is empty, and work that can be completed once the new tenancy has started;
- The urgency of need for housing, and any vulnerability of the incoming tenant.
- Choice around finishes and options for any improvements that may be undertaken as part of the void period;
- Making efficient use of any existing disabled adaptations.

3.4 PCH may use the void period to bring forward any work that may cause major disruption to the incoming tenant, or may be difficult to undertake once the property is occupied, such as major or programmed improvement works.

3.5 All void work will be undertaken by our appointed contractors and post inspected to ensure work is completed to a satisfactory standard in relation to time and quality.

3.6 Managing adapted voids

PCH recognises that properties suitable for individuals with disabilities are scarce, and Plymouth has an ageing population. In order to make the most efficient use of existing facilities, we will not routinely remove adaptations from empty properties. Where possible, PCH will aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants with disabilities, and/or recycle any adaptations that are removed from a property.

4. Letting standards

4.1 PCH aims to create high quality, sustainable tenancies and achieve a high level of customer satisfaction. All properties let will consistently meet our own PCH letting standard. Needs something about cost / quality balance.

4.2 Our PCH letting standard is developed in consultation with customers and is communicated widely to tenants and prospective tenants prior to viewing.

4.3 Where the decorative condition is poor, PCH will provide decoration vouchers to the incoming tenant. The value of voucher offered will reflect the extent of the decoration required to bring the property to a decent standard throughout.

4.4 PCH will undertake internal decoration to supported housing properties where deemed not fit for purpose. We may also undertake decoration where an incoming tenant is vulnerable or elderly.

5. New Tenancies

5.1 All prospective tenants are provided with information about the property attributes, and local neighbourhood facilities prior to viewing and at sign-up.

5.2 When a prospective tenant has indicated their acceptance of a vacant property, the tenancy will commence as soon as possible after all essential repairs are completed. All tenancies start on a Monday.

5.3 The sign up process and settling in visit has a significant impact on the sustainability of tenancies. PCH will have supporting procedures to ensure effective measures are in place.

5.4 All new tenants are given the opportunity to feed back their satisfaction with the void management process and standard of the property when let.

5.5 Information about the PCH minimum letting standard will be given to the tenant at viewing.

5.6 During the early viewing process, prospective tenants will be given the choice to keep appropriate items left in the property by the former tenant. This may include items such as Curtains and carpets. Any item offered to prospective tenants in this way should be in a good condition and not pose a risk to the health and safety of the prospective.

6. Equality and Diversity

6.1 PCH recognises that it operates in a community within which there is wide social diversity, and are committed to providing equal opportunities and valuing diversity.

6.2 Through the management of our empty properties we aim to treat all customers fairly, and with respect and professionalism regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation and marital status.

6.3 To enable all residents to have clear information and equal access to our available properties, PCH publishes information in a range of appropriate languages and formats and through a range of media. Feedback is also accepted through a variety of different routes to reflect individual customers' preferences or needs.

6.4 This policy has been designed to be fully inclusive regardless of the ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious belief, or disability of service users or residents.

6.5 The policy has been developed giving full consideration to the PCH Equality and Diversity policy.

7. Review and Monitoring

7.1 This policy will be reviewed regularly in accordance with PCH's review timetable by the Customer Focus Committee.

7.2 Procedures relating to this policy will also be periodically reviewed, taking into account any operational issues that arise.

7.3 Review will take into account any changes in law and best practice.

7.4 The reviews will include equality impact assessments to ensure that all of our policies encourage and support our determination to promote equality and eliminate unlawful discrimination.

7.5 Plymouth Community Homes will ensure that opportunities are provided for tenants and leaseholders to engage in the process of reviewing and monitoring this policy.

7.6 Systems will be in place to monitor progress against agreed targets, and reported via the Customer Focus Committee to the Board on an annual basis.

7.7 Monitoring will include the following elements:

- assessments of tenant satisfaction with what is being done, making sure that methods of doing so take into account the access needs of all;
- regular reports to the board who have overall responsibility for ensuring that the policy delivers continuous improvement and value for money
- systems that identify performance issues and monitor the progress of actions to address them.

- **Relevant legislation**

The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance (3.2)

Defective Premises Act 1972

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

KLOE 6 - Tenancy and Estate Management

KLOE 3 – Stock investment and asset management

CRE Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing 2006

Chartered Institute of Housing Good Practice Briefing (2001) lettings

- Links to other policies and strategies
 - Tenancy management policy
 - Rechargeable repairs policy
 - Allocations policy and procedure
 - Vulnerable Person's policy
 - Health and Safety Policy
 - Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty policy
 - Tenancy Management Policy
 - Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.