



# Void & Lettings Management Policy

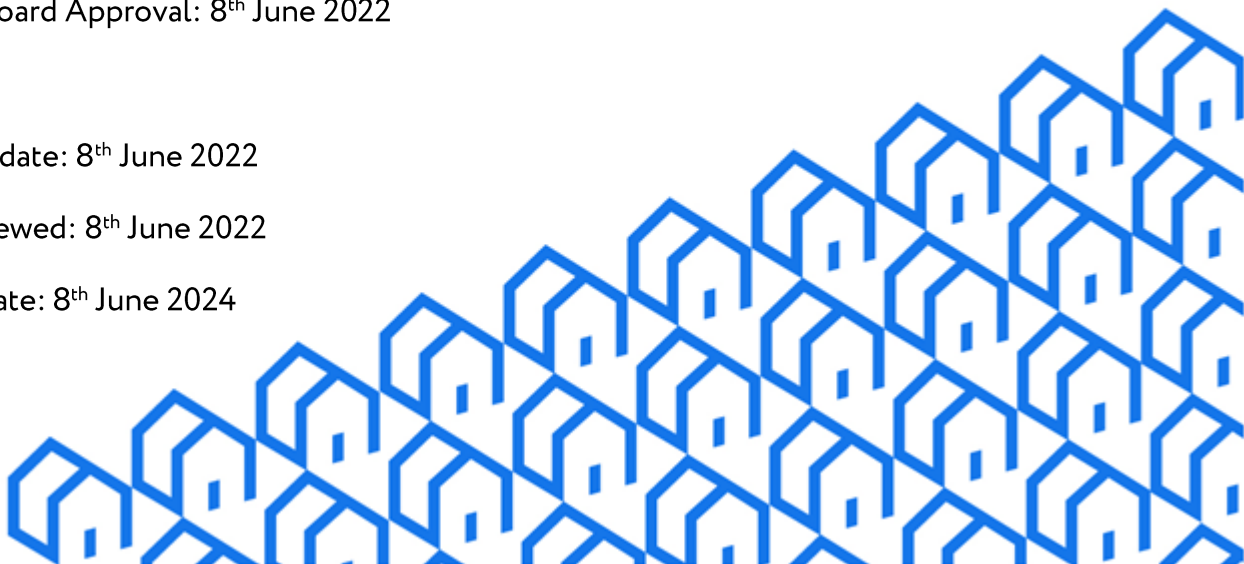
Date of Board Approval: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Version: 1

Effective date: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Last Reviewed: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Review date: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2024



## **Introduction**

Empower Housing Association (EHA) strives to offer a home for life to our tenants, however there are inevitably occasions when a tenancy will come to an end earlier than we would hope. Voids may arise due to formal termination of a tenancy, a tenant transferring to another tenancy or the death of a tenant.

Although voids are underwritten by partner agencies, it is EHA's responsibility to inform and invoice the relevant partner should a void occur. This income is crucial to ensure EHA can continue, improve, and offer value for money in the services it provides.

EHA aims to let every property to a tenant which is the best match for that property, and in particular, letting every wheelchair accessible property to tenants whose needs require this level of space and adaptation. Each tenancy awarded is based on the promotion of the tenant's best interests, rights, and choices.

## **Scope of the Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to set out EHA's position on the management of voids. Void management actively covers a number of related activities. These include:

- Tenancy termination
- Property inspections
- Identifying rechargeable works and other tenant responsibilities
- Ordering and supervising repair work
- Offering tenancies and assisting with transitions
- Creating tenancies, signing tenancy agreements, submitting housing benefit claims etc.

This policy applies to all rented property owned or managed by EHA.

## **Tenant Termination**

All Tenants are required to meet their obligations as described within their Tenancy Agreement, including the provision of 28 days' written notice unless a shorter notice period has been agreed with EHA, leaving the bedroom in an acceptable condition as far as practically possible, except for fair wear and tear. An End of Tenancy Booklet will be provided to the tenant and their representative detailing their rights and responsibilities. This booklet is required to be completed in full and returned to EHA in order for the termination to be processed.

Upon receipt of the End of Tenancy Booklet EHA will notify housing benefit of the tenants wishes and request for their claim to be cancelled in line with the notice period. Any tenants who pay their own rent directly to EHA will be advised on the status of their rent account and must agree to pay any outstanding debts before the tenancy ends.

In line with the tenancy agreement the notice period will come to an end on a Sunday, with all rent due paid in full. Tenants will be required to vacate the property by noon on the Monday after the tenancy end date otherwise they will be liable for a further week's rent.

### **Death of a Tenant**

Where the termination of a tenancy is due to the death of a tenant the termination date will be the date on which the tenant died. The tenant's representative will have four weeks to clear out the bedroom/property during which time no rent will be charged.

With due sensitivity, EHA employees will advise the tenant's representative of any issues which will result in a recharge liability, and that this will be charged against the tenant's estate unless addressed by their relatives.

### **Property Inspections**

Where notice to terminate a tenancy is received an initial inspection of a bedroom/property shall be carried out by EHA's Building and Quality Manager prior to the tenant vacating the property.

The purpose of this inspection is to ascertain the general condition of the bedroom/property and to advise the tenant and their representative of what is required to end the tenancy satisfactorily. This will cover obligations such as any work required to be done by the tenant prior to ending the tenancy. The tenant and their representative will be advised that EHA will recharge the tenant £250 if it is found such works have not been completed prior to vacating the property. This charge will include tenant damage, decorating, disrepair or neglect, changing locks or replacing keys for external doors if not returned, and for the cost of removing rubbish, furniture or personal belongings. When the bedroom/property is vacated a further inspection will be completed.

When a property becomes fully vacant EHA's Building and Quality Manager will arrange to meet with the tenant and/or their representative at the property to complete a full property review, take final meter readings and collect all keys. During this time EHA may take the opportunity to carry out major repairs and/or major component replacements and planned maintenance works while a property is empty.

Alterations in void bedrooms/properties and/or non-standard fixtures left by the previous tenants will be gifted to the incoming tenant only where they are to an acceptable standard and fit for purpose.

In exceptional circumstances EHA may carry out decoration works to the bedroom/property while it is void, particularly where the condition of the bedroom/property is exceptionally poor and where failure to carry out such works might have a significant impact on the Lett-ability of the bedroom/property.

### **Fully vacant properties**

Properties which have been left fully vacant will require fortnightly health and safety and security checks to be undertaken by the keyholder (usually the Care Provider) in line with the property insurance. Any issues noted during the fortnightly inspections must be reported to EHA as soon as possible in order for them to be addressed and actioned in line with our Repairs Policy.

All empty homes will be issued with electrical and gas certificates and an EPC in compliance with our legal requirements.

### **Invoicing**

Due to EHA not holding nomination rights for schemes the Association manages void times and costs will be the responsibility of partner agencies i.e. Local Authority Commissioners, care providers etc to manage and cover void costs until a suitable referral has been identified.

All invoices will be raised on a monthly basis where agreements around the payment of voids are in place and in line with the terms of these agreements.

### **Tenancy Sustainment**

EHA will seek to minimise unnecessary voids by providing intensive housing management to support vulnerable tenants with financial inclusion advice (relating to benefits, utilities, debt or budgeting), by the installation of adaptations via a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) so that tenants with particular needs can remain in their home. With the provision of housing related support our tenants can maintain their tenancies by understanding their requirements.

All new tenants will receive help and support with claiming housing benefit from EHA's Rents Department.

## **Re-Letting Voids**

EHA provides tenancies for individuals requiring varying levels of support to whom environment plays a key part to their independence. As such, EHA aims to ensure that any nominations to tenancies are appropriate and suitable for both the incoming tenant, and any other tenants that may be affected. Existing tenants in shared housing are directly affected by the selection of incoming tenants, as are tenants in schemes consisting on self-contained accommodation within accommodation where some facilities may be shared.

Tenant nominations impact significantly on the sustainability of tenancies and the right for tenants to enjoy peaceful occupation of their homes.

Tenancy nominations may also impact how the rent in our tenants' home is paid. In order to qualify for exempt status from the Regulators guidance around low-cost accommodation and to demonstrate that EHA provide Specialist Supported Housing (SSH), tenants must be in receipt of a level of support, which approximates to the services of support which would be provided in a care home. As EHA seeks to only provide Specialist Supported Housing, nominations for tenants must satisfy this exemption.

In accordance with the Regulator's Tenancy Standard this Policy aims to ensure that EHA:

- Let's homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way
- Takes into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants
- Makes the best use of available housing
- Lettings are compatible with the purpose of the housing

When allocating accommodation in supported living accommodation, EHA has to comply with the Regulators Standards, regulations linked to the Health and Social Care Act (Regulated Activities) Regulations, commissioning referral processes, nomination agreements with placing authorities and this Policy.

## **Nominations**

EHA hold nomination agreements with either Local authorities or Care Providers for all of the properties we manage.

EHA's geographical spread EHA take nominations from Local Authorities (who have a full picture of housing need in their area) rather than operating numerous housing registers.

Referrals for supported living accommodation will be considered by EHA and their decision will be based on the eligibility criteria for this service, Housing Needs Assessment and referral information.

All nominations must have:

- The ability to meet the rental and service charge payments. This includes applicants who would be entitled to Housing Benefit
- A demonstrable need for supported accommodation. Where necessary, evidence may be required of an applicant's entitlement to a funded support package
- Demonstrable evidence that the suitability of the tenancy has been considered, including any impact on other tenants.

EHA will not exclude from consideration any application on the grounds of degree or type of disability, current living situation, age, race, religion, gender or sexuality.

In order that applicants are considered for vacancies which will meet their needs a New Tenant Questionnaire (NTQ) will be completed. This will allow all parties to detail any specific requirements and support needs that the applicant may have and agree the suitability of the nomination.

If a referral for a place in a supported living scheme is rejected, the reason for the rejection will be communicated to the applicant and the person who made the referral or nomination, along with details of the appeals procedure and any information about alternative supported living schemes. Such an appeal should be made to the Benefits Manager. If they are dissatisfied with the way their application has been handled applicants may use EHA's Complaints Policy and Procedure.

## **Equality and Diversity**

In line with EHA's Equality and Diversity Policy all applicants for housing will be considered in the same manner regardless of their protected characteristics in accordance with the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

## **Helping People to Make an Informed Decision**

Where practical, referrals will be given the opportunity to visit and if appropriate, stay at the supported living scheme they have applied for, and be given suitable information to allow them to make an informed choice about the suitability of the accommodation along with the level of care, support and supervision provided by the nominated Care Provider.

## **Promoting Independence**

To promote a move towards independence, tenants already living within supported living will be given priority if a vacancy arises in a scheme offering more support if they have been assessed to move on.

## **Funding**

Before a place in a supported living scheme is confirmed, an applicant will need to have entitlement to funding that is adequate to meet their needs or be able to demonstrate that they have the means to pay the rent and person care and support charges or are eligible for Housing Benefit.

## **Financial Restrictions**

Account will be taken of income and capital/savings in assessing an applicant's ability to pursue other housing options. An overall income limit is applied, inclusive of interest from savings. Account is taken of any savings or capital, with a limit of £16,000 applied which an applicant could be expected to use to contribute to the payment of their own rent.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Senior Management team has the overall responsibility of ensuring that everyone nominated or referred for a place in a supported living scheme is considered in accordance with this Policy.

## **Approach and Method**

The key aims and objectives outlined are also dependant on a number of other relevant policies and procedures and cannot be achieved solely by the implantation of the Void and Lettings Management Policy. The following policies and procedures all impact to

some extent on EHA being able to effectively achieve the aims and objectives of this policy:

- Repairs Policy
- Tenancy and Tenure Management Policy

EHA's Board in its formal approval of the policy acknowledges that it accepts full responsibility for its implementation. Day-to-day responsibility for the operation and monitoring of this policy lies with the appropriate managers. All relevant employees have a responsibility to ensure that this policy is applied as instructed.

### **Monitoring, Performance Measurement and Reporting**

The activities covered under the Void & Lettings Management Policy will be subject to performance monitoring on a continuing basis. EHA will report on our key performance areas to our Management Team, the Board and our tenants. KPI's will include tenancy sustainability and income lost due to voids.

If any significant issues of concern arise, these will be dealt with by the Managing Director who will report such matters to the Board. Any matter which demonstrates a serious failure of internal controls will also be reported immediately.



## Appendix 1 - Minimal Lettable Standard

It is EHA's policy that the following minimum standards should be achieved for all voids (including bedrooms and fully vacant properties):

<b>Works</b>	<b>Minimum Standard</b>
General Cleanliness	The bedroom/property will be cleared of furniture, carpets and belongings/rubbish from the previous tenant. Floors should be swept out, kitchen and bathrooms' surfaces to be washed down. Any loft spaces, basements and out-buildings should be emptied.
Garden Areas	Gardens attached to the property should be cleared of rubbish Broken or hazardous fencing should be removed. Paths and steps should be free from trip hazards.
Electrics	All electrics must be checked and a certificate of inspection retained by EHA. Alterations to the electric system clearly undertaken by the tenant must be removed unless compliance certificate covers them.
Gas	All houses with gas central heating to have a full gas safety check undertaken and compliance certificate issued to new tenant.
Smoke Alarm	All smoke alarms will be tested. Where fitted, CO alarms will be tested.
Water Supply	During severe cold spells consideration should be given to whether stopcocks should be shut off and the water supply drained down.
Windows	All windows should be fully operational and checked for safety. Window keys should be issued to tenants where we have fitted locks.
Front Door	Minimum mortice on timber door or security lock on glazed door. Check for security and draughts/water ingress.
Internal Pass Doors	All pass doors should be intact and operating properly. Bathroom doors should have a locking device. Door closers should be operating where fitted.
Floors	All loose and missing floorboards to be re-secured/replaced. Floor surface to be even to allow carpets to be laid.
Skirtings and Facings	Missing or badly damaged skirting/facings to be replaced. If possible to repair – should be re-secured and filled where necessary.
Bedroom Cupboards	Missing shelves or hanging rails to be replaced
Hall Cupboards	Missing shelves or hanging rails to be replaced
Shower unit	Any electric showers should be included in the electrical check, if faulty they should be replaced.
Bathroom	Bathroom suite should be checked for chips/cracks. Coloured bathroom