

# VOIDS MANAGEMENT POLICY



## **POLICY STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this policy is :-

To provide a clear policy which applies to the management of our rented properties when they are empty between tenancies. It relates to all existing properties that become empty when a tenancy ends, and the property is immediately available for re-allocation. Void properties are an inevitable part of Housing Management, as tenancies end and customers move on to other housing options.

- A property is void when there is no current tenant. Whilst the property is void, the organisation cannot collect a rental income.
- The loss of rental income can have an impact on the quality of service Albyn Housing Society Ltd (thereafter referred to as Albyn) can deliver.
- Effective void management will help ensure that Albyn are meeting the needs of the applicants who are on the Highland Housing Register (HHR) in line with the Allocations Policy.
- A procedure and process map support this policy document.

## **SCOPE:**

This policy applies to all housing stock owned and managed by Albyn, and is applicable to customers, employees and contractors working on behalf of Albyn.

- It is the principle of this policy to reduce inefficiencies by ensuring that void and allocation activities are carried out simultaneously.
- When a property becomes vacant Albyn will refer to The Asset Management Strategy in particular to properties which have been acquired via the Mortgage to Rent scheme to assess they are financially viable to relet. This will also involve the Asset Management Team's input.
- Albyn Housing Society will effectively and efficiently utilise the notice period to proactively undertake void activities to reduce the void period.
- The utilisation of key safes at void properties will enable multiple contractors and Customer Services staff to carry out void activities simultaneously.

- Project Management principles will be used to ensure a smooth turnaround of void properties.
- A pre- termination inspection will be carried out at the earliest opportunity, wherever practically possible, to ensure effective communication with the outgoing customer throughout the notice period and beyond.
- We will keep prospective customers, who have received an offer, informed throughout the void management process.

## **KEY STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES:**

### **Overall Responsibility :**

- **The Board**  
The Board is responsible for agreeing this policy to be implemented.
- **Leadership Team**  
Leadership Team is responsible for implementing the policy in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements.
- **Staff**  
Ensure that Policy decision and procedures are followed.  
Any queries from customers are dealt with in a timely manner.
- **Specific Responsibilities**  
Customer Service Managers ensure Tenant Consultations are completed.

## **APPROACH AND METHOD:**

We aim to meet the following objectives:

- A proactive and efficient void management service is in place to manage the void period effectively and limit the length of time properties are empty as much as possible.
- That Albyn complies with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Social Housing Charter Outcomes relating to Void Management.
- The void period is minimised, and Albyn reduces the amount of rental income lost through void properties.
- Void properties are available timeously for applicants on the HHR.

### **Formal Termination.**

- A tenanted customer is required to give 28 days (4 weeks) written notice of their intention to end their tenancy. The notice period will only start when the notice has been received in writing. This can be by letter or email. Albyn will inform the customer the end of the Tenancy Agreement date, book a pre-termination

inspection and remind them of their responsibilities including the “ tidy tenancy criteria “ which is:

1. At least 4 weeks’ notice is given.
2. Customer gives access for the booked pre-termination inspection.
3. All sets of keys issued are returned.
4. Customer provides final meter readings
5. The home and garden are left tidy, clean and cleared.
6. The wheelie bins are in situ.
7. Any repairs that the customer is responsible for are finished to a good standard.

At the pre-termination inspection the customer will be advised that any fixtures or fittings installed without permission should be removed and a closing balance will be given to ensure that the rent due up to the last day of the tenancy is paid in full.

Full end of tenancy details are specified in the Tenancy Agreement and in the Tenants Handbook.

If all 8 tidy tenancy criteria are met, a tidy tenancy payment can be made to the customer which is covered by the tidy tenancy policy and procedure.

### **Death of a Tenanted Customer**

When a customer dies and there is no one who qualifies to succeed the tenancy , the tenancy will terminate on the date the customer died. Albyn will advise the next of kin of the end of tenancy responsibilities, and procedures which are the same as those detailed for formal termination above.

Albyn will give the next of kin 14 days (2 weeks) rent free to clear the property and return all sets of keys from the date of death.

Albyn recognises that this is a difficult and sensitive time for our customers family. Therefore, should the next of kin want to retain the keys for longer than 2 weeks, Albyn will recover costs for loss of rental income and an occupancy charge, which will be set at the same level as the rent. This will be made and recovered from the former customers estate or via a private agreement with the next of kin.

There is discretion on these charges if the Housing Officers feels the circumstances warrant the waving of the charges e.g nature of the death, location of next of kin etc. We aim to ensure a consistent approach is applied throughout on a case by case basis.

### **Transfer**

The end of the Tenancy Agreement responsibilities for a customer transferring to another property owned and managed by the Albyn Group, or one of the other HHR partners is the same process as those in the case of a Formal Termination. However, the tenant is not eligible for a tidy tenancy payment.

### **Abandonment**

When Albyn suspects that a property has been abandoned, a full investigation will be carried out as per the Abandonment Policy and Procedure.

Only on expiry of the second abandonment notice and when Albyn has done everything that can be reasonably expected, will Albyn look to arrange a lock change and repossess the property.

**Eviction**

Eviction is always a last resort for Albyn to take, and will only be used when all other possible and reasonable actions have been taken.

The end of tenancy responsibilities for a customer being evicted is not eligible for a tidy tenancy payment.

**Monitoring and Reporting**

As this is an important area for Albyn, reporting will normally include the following:

- Weekly report to all Customer Services staff, showing all current voids for monitoring.
- Monthly reports to the appropriate senior staff with patch performance.
- Quarterly reports to the Performance Committee including the number of voids re-allocated, the average void turnaround time and the amount of void loss.
- Annual ARC return.

**RELEVANT KEY LEGISLATION AND RELATED DOCUMENTS: (not limited to)**

Legislation	Relevant Documents
Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 Data Protection Act 1998 The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008 The Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1994	The Scottish Social Housing Charter HHR Guidance Allocation Policy

**EIA – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT:** Summary EqIA completed. April 2019  
 This policy is customer focussed in meeting needs and delivering a void management service to customers.  
 As this policy will be implemented in a consistent manner in all cases, an initial assessment concluded there would be no disadvantage to any particular group.  
 Therefore, there is no requirement for a full EIA.

**Guidance Section**

Policy Name: Void Management policy Latest Revision: V2	Policy No. VMP 001	Revised by: RN Verified by:
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<b>This Policy is linked to the relevant strategy/Values</b>		
<b>Service origin</b>	<b>Customer Services</b>	
<b>Policy Owner</b>	<b>Jenny Soley</b>	
<b>Risk map reference?</b>		
<b>Tenant Consultation required and completed</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Completed April 2019</b>
<b>Staff Consultation required</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>EIA date completed</b>	<b>April 2019</b>	
<b>Date Board approval</b>		
<b>Date of next review</b>	<b>2024</b>	

**Version Control**

Version	Date	Author	Status	Comments
0.2	6/3/2019	JS	Draft	Sent to JS for final draft
0.2	8/4/2019	<u>MMC</u>	Amendments	RN final draft