



## **The Langstane Group**

### **Void Management Policy**

Date approved by Leadership Team	5 December 2022
Approval date	5 December 2022
Implementation date	30 March 2023
Review date	December 2025
Version	V2

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date approved</b>	<b>Changes</b>
Version 1	3 December 2018	First issue
Version 2	5 December 2022	Complete re-write

Langstane Housing Association Ltd is a registered Scottish Charity No. SC 011754, a registered Property Factor No. PF 000666 and a registered Letting Agent No. LARN2001005



## 1. Introduction

Langstane Housing Association is a Co-operative and Community Benefit Society, and a registered social landlord with charitable status.

The Langstane Group (Langstane / the Group) consists of Langstane Housing Association Limited and its wholly owned subsidiaries.

This policy applies to all members of the Langstane Group.

Langstane Housing Association is committed to ensuring that the turnover of housing stock is managed in such a way as to maximise rental income, meet housing need and maintain good estate management.

The term Void is used to describe a property when it is without a tenant for any length of time. The void period is the time measured in calendar days between the date of termination of the previous tenancy or repossession and the start of the new tenancy. A property can become void for a number of reasons. These include:

- Where a tenant terminates the tenancy in accordance with their tenancy agreement
- On the death of a tenant where there is no successor in accordance with legislation
- By abandonment of a tenant, where the appropriate legal notices have been served in accordance with the abandonment procedures
- By eviction where the Association has completed the relevant court action
- Where the tenant is transferred to another Association property

By setting down how the Association manages void properties, the following values of the Business Plan are met:

- We manage our resources to ensure our financial well being
- We provide homes not houses and support our tenants to live independently and be active members of our communities.

## 2. Aims and objectives of the policy

The aims and objectives of this policy are to ensure:

- applicants are housed without unnecessary delay;
- we minimise void rental loss;
- we minimise end of tenancy arrears;
- we reduce re-chargeable repair costs;
- we achieve a uniform lettable standard

## 3. Links to other strategic documents and policies

The Group's Void Management Policy is linked to a number of strategic documents and policies in particular but not solely:

- Allocations Policy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Planned and Cyclical Maintenance Policy

- Tenancy Sustainment Strategy
- Sustainability Strategy
- Lettable Standard
- Customer Care Charter
- Compensation and Redress Policy
- Recharge Repairs Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Legionella Policy
- Asbestos Policy

## 4. Policy

### 4.1 Termination Notice

28 days written notice is required for all tenancies as prescribed by the Scottish Secure Tenancy, Short Scottish Secure Tenancy or otherwise stated in any lease agreement (for example a commercial lease). Termination of tenancy can be done by letter, e-mail (only if the e-mail address has previously been registered with the Association) and the Association's termination of tenancy form. A forwarding address must be supplied. The termination will be acknowledged in writing within two working days of receipt. The acknowledgement will confirm the rent due up to the termination date and contain other information on the tenant's responsibilities when returning the property to the Association.

If a tenant returns the keys to their tenancy before the termination date then confirmation either verbally or in writing the tenant has finished with the property will be taken and this information will be recorded on the housing management system.

The Allocations Assistant will also confirm to the tenant they remain liable for the rent due until either the property is re-let before the termination date or the termination date is reached.

### 4.2 Pre Termination Check

A pre termination check will be carried out wherever possible within **five working days** of the tenant's notice being received. This will be carried out by a Housing Officer and is not a full and final inspection. The main purpose of this property check is to explain the lettable standard and:

- Identify any aspects of disrepair which are the tenant's responsibility
- To agree what will be removed from / what will remain in the property e.g. flooring
- To confirm any alterations carried out by the outgoing tenant and entitlement to compensation for improvements.

Anything that is considered by the Housing Officer to be fair wear and tear will not be subject to recharge.

The tenant will be given the opportunity to rectify issues for which they are responsible before handing back the keys to the property. These will be

confirmed in writing to the tenant after the property check. The property will be subject to a post termination inspection by the Property Officer. This is carried out following the end of tenancy. Further works may be identified for which the tenant is responsible and will subsequently be re-charged.

If the tenant asks the Association to carry out repairs, these works have to be paid for in advance and carried out within an agreed timescale.

Once the keys have been handed back to the Association, the tenant will not be allowed back into the property to carry out any outstanding repairs, collect belongings or mail. If there is any question of the suitability of an alteration or improvement, the Property Officer will visit to assess the work and give the necessary advice.

Where flooring / carpets are judged to be in excellent or very good condition permission can be given for them to be left in situ. If carpets / flooring are left, this will be noted on the inventory by the Property Officer and incoming tenants will take over responsibility for these items. The exception to this is laminate floor in flats above ground floor. In all cases this will be removed. In addition no permission will be given to tenants to lay laminated flooring in non-ground floor properties.

#### 4.3 Post Termination Inspections

The Property Officer will inspect the property when it becomes empty within **two working days** of keys being returned.

The purpose of this inspection to:

- Ensure the property is empty
- Ensure the property is secure
- Assess the property's condition against the Lettable Standard
- Complete mandatory checks according to inspection forms / lists
- Identify and assess any further repairs required to the property
- Assess the decorative standard and review the level of decoration allowance previously identified in the pre-termination inspection.
- Identify whether there are any outstanding items of disrepair which are the responsibility of the outgoing tenant
- Review qualifying improvements for compensation
- Arrange for gas and electrical appliances and installations to be professionally checked
- Determine whether prospective tenants can view the property (if applicable)
- Update the Energy Performance Certificate if necessary
- Check whether any kitchen, bathroom or heating upgrades have been missed from programme of work
- Check compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard including the number of sockets, hot water, cold water tank jackets and kitchen storage.

At this point further items may be discovered that were not previously identified if, for example, there was furniture in the way.

Photographs will be taken of each room of the property, repairs required and decoration or condition during the void inspection process. These are used to provide evidence of rechargeable repairs for example where:

- The tenant has not carried out the repairs identified at the pre-termination visit
- The tenant did not carry out the required repairs satisfactorily
- Damage has occurred or repair work identified following the pre-termination inspection
- The tenant left the property without giving notice
- The tenant did not allow a pre-termination visit to take place
- The tenant did not remove their belongings such as furnishings or floor coverings and the Housing Officer had not agreed they could be left.

If a tenant has installed an electric shower without permission, the shower will be checked via inspection and an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) to ensure it meets the required standard. If it meets the standard the Association will take on responsibility for the future maintenance of it and the tenant will not be recharged. If the shower does not meet the required standard, it will be removed and the tenant recharged.

If the tenant had permission to install a shower it can be left in the property, provided it continues to meet the required standards. If it no longer meets the required standard, it will be removed but the tenant not recharged.

If electric or gas appliances, such as built in ovens and hobs ~~etc.~~ have been fitted by the tenant and have been left in the property on termination, they will be checked to ensure they meet the required standard. Any built in appliances will then become the responsibility of the incoming tenant and will be noted on the inventory by the Property Officer.

If they do not meet the standard, they will be removed and the tenant will be recharged. If the tenant removes any electrical items and leaves the wires in an unsafe manner the tenant will be recharged for making this safe.

The tenant will be charged for the removal of all non-compliant lighting installed in the property as these fail to meet electrical standards.

Where a property requires additional cleaning in order to meet the lettable standard i.e. a deep clean, this will be classed as a rechargeable repair and the tenant will be invoiced for the full amount.

#### 4.4 Decoration Vouchers

Langstane Housing Association has in place a facility to provide decoration vouchers to tenants. There is a separate procedure in place for how the Association processes vouchers.

A decision on issuing a decoration voucher can be taken at any point between a property becoming void and a new tenancy beginning or following disturbance as a result of works being undertaken by or on behalf of the Association.

In terms of decoration where a property does not meet the lettable standard decoration vouchers can be offered under the following circumstances:

- Staining to walls / ceilings as a result of heavy smoking
- Poorly maintained decoration
- Where there is graffiti
- Where the property has been painted e.g. black and the incoming tenant would have difficulty decorating
- Repairs to a property that have left an impact on the decoration of the property.

Decoration vouchers seen as a way to help meet the lettable standard and to enhance a property where it would be difficult to let.

The Property Officer will decide on a case by case basis whether to decorate the property at void or issue decoration vouchers.

In limited circumstances the Housing Officer will be able to offer a decoration voucher. These can be issued where the property has previously been refused on the basis of decoration, or the applicant has indicated decoration would be a potential factor in the property being refused.

#### 4.5 Customer Satisfaction

All termination acknowledgement letters will be accompanied by a tenant exit satisfaction survey. This survey can also be conducted at the pre termination check. The Association will use the data collected to analyse tenant satisfaction with the service in accordance with the Customer Care Charter.

In addition, at the time of signing the lease agreement, the Housing Officer will complete a 'new tenant satisfaction survey' form. This survey will ask a number of questions relating to the allocation and void processes. These responses help inform policy, procedure and customer satisfaction in relation to their new home.

Housing employees will aim to visit all new tenants within a six week period of the tenancy commencing. The main purpose of these visits is to ensure the tenant has moved into the property, to ascertain if there are any issues, to check, if applicable, that a universal credit application has been completed and to discuss if any support is required to maintain the tenancy.

#### 4.6 Compensation for Improvements (applies to Langstane Housing Association only)

Tenants have a right to claim compensation for certain improvements made to the property, provided the Association's permission to carry out the work was granted. Compensation will not be provided for responsibilities under the Tenancy Agreement such as decoration and keeping the property clean and tidy. The Association will follow the Scottish Secure Tenants (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 2002 with compensation payable at the end of the tenancy.

#### 4.7 Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH)

ESSH2 targets have been temporarily set aside but that we will commit to ensuring that all new lets from now will have an EPC Band D or higher.

When a property becomes void that does not meet band D of an EPC the Association will survey the property at the beginning of the void period to establish what works will be required in order for the property to be compliant and meet or exceed band D. A cost for these works will be sought and the Association will undertake an evaluation if the work can feasibly be carried out. Where the Association is unable to carry out the works and decides that a temporary exemption is required from the EPC band D minimum standard, we will still aim to install measures which improve energy efficiency for tenants to achieve the best possible energy efficiency rating.

The following exemptions and options will apply to re-letting houses that do not meet EPC band D from 2025:

- Houses that are currently occupied. Sitting tenants are not required to vacate property
- Social objections. Where other tenants or owner occupiers in the building refuse to participate in the installation of energy efficiency measures
- New technology. An exemption may be appropriate if there are reasonable grounds to consider that improvements in the evaluation of energy efficiency of buildings will recognise the impact of measures that have been installed.
- Legal. If the necessary work required to bring a house up to at least EPC band D cannot be carried out legally, there will be grounds for an exemption.
- Demolition or disposal. An exemption may be appropriate for homes subject to an approved decision to demolish, or dispose by way of sale, the property by Committee (for Local authorities) or Governing Bodies (RSLs), where the landlord considers that investment is not cost-effective by reason of the intention to demolition or dispose of it
- The landlord must make every reasonable effort to inform and explain to other tenants or owner occupiers why work is necessary, and why their participation and co-operation is important. Any exemption from the minimum requirement to meet at least EPC band D should be reviewed at least once every five years.

Where a property cannot be brought up to ESSH standards, the Property Officer will inform the Allocations Assistant and the incoming tenant will be informed.

#### 4.8 Legionella

Water hygiene in void properties will be managed in accordance with the Association's Legionella policy.

#### 4.9 Asbestos

The Association is committed to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all its employees and others who enter any property owned or managed by them. This includes contractors, clients, visitors, tenants and



members of the public who may be affected by its actions or omissions. In accordance with the Asbestos Management Policy the Association will ensure it complies with all appropriate legislation and establishes clear guidelines whenever asbestos is encountered in either its commercial premises or housing stock.

Any works in void properties will be carried out in accordance with the Asbestos Management Policy and where there is concern about Asbestos containing materials (ACM's) in a property the Team Leader - Property Compliance will coordinate any necessary surveys and remedial works to asbestos.

#### 4.10 Categories of Void Repairs

There are 3 categories that a void repair can be categorised as:

- Minor 5 working days
- Standard 10 working days
- Standard plus 18 working days

Which category the void falls into is determined by the Property Officer during the inspection process.

Void timescales will be monitored by the Team Leader – Repairs and Voids, chased where appropriate and where the contractor fails to meet a target will discuss this with them.

Where there are major repairs or structural work (e.g. to rectify damage caused by fire or flood) or modernisation work where the property would be unsafe to be occupied this will be passed to the Team Leader – Major Works to manage. The period in void will continue to be monitored by the Property Officer for that area.

Where only minor repairs are required in addition to statutory checks and the property has been allocated, the Association may have these works completed post occupation. The incoming tenant will be informed of the works required and completion will be monitored by the Property Officer.

#### 4.11 Post Void Inspection

When the contractor has completed the void, the property will be inspected by the Property Officer within **1 working day** to ensure it meets the lettable standard and is suitable for re-letting. A video tour of the property will be recorded and photographs taken at this stage to assist with marketing.

Where the property does not meet the required standard, the issues will be raised with the contractor immediately who will be asked to remedy any faults within a maximum of **two working days**. The property will be re-inspected by the Property Officer within this timescale.

#### 4.12 Void Due to Tenant Death

Where a property has become void due to the death of a tenant, the tenancy ends at date of death. Where a next of kin is identified they will be given seven

calendar days from the date of death where no rent will be charged to allow belongings to be removed from the property.

Full rent will be charged to the tenant's estate for any time beyond seven days unless otherwise indicated by the Housing Manager. If, after the seven day period, there appears to have been no attempt to commence the removal of possessions then **2 working days**' notice will be given to the next of kin that the Association intends to change the locks and confirmation provided that any items left will be disposed of.

Where there is no next of kin or estate identified the Association will recover the property with immediate effect. Where there is Police involvement after the death of the tenant the seven day period will begin from the date when the property is released back to the next of kin.

#### 4.13 Void Due to an Abandoned Property

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 s17 sets out the procedures which must be followed by a landlord recovering possession of an abandoned property. When the required four-week notice is served on the tenant who has abandoned the property, the process of identifying a new tenant will begin. If the abandonment does not proceed the allocations process will cease.

A Property Officer will arrange for an inspection on the day the locks are changed when the property is recovered and the void process will proceed as per -policy. The Property Officer will take an inventory of the tenants belongings left in the property at end of tenancy.

#### 4.14 Voids Escalation

Where a property has been ready to let for 21 days and still remains vacant, the Housing and Property Team Leaders will meet to review the void and take into account any previous refusal reasons or other feedback from applicants. The following will be considered and actioned where required:

- Reviewing the decoration and considering if full decoration by the Association is required
- Laying suitable flooring e.g. carpets to make the property more attractive
- Using the Association's website, social media and Choice Based Lettings provider to advertise vacant properties (the allocations policy allows where a property falls within the low demand or hard to let category to consider a choice based lettings approach to allocations). This may be done once notice is given if the property falls within the low demand or hard to let category.

### 5. Monitoring and review

The Void Management process is monitored weekly by Team Leaders with the Housing and Property Managers having an overview of the process. This includes:

- Number of voids, and their status including the number of days the property has been in each void phase
- Nature of Tenancy termination, and number of properties returned in lettable condition
- Offer refusal rates and reasons, and action taken in response to refusals

- Void turnaround times, highlighting any issues such as contractor or DLO delays, and the number of voids requiring major works
- Voids as a percentage of total stock
- Cost of works, and average cost per void. Employees will note the individual performance timescales for each phase of the void process within their area of work and adhere to these. In particular employees will work towards meeting the target set in the performance reports for re-letting properties. The timescales are noted on a separate flow chart for ease of reference. These will be monitored closely by the Team Leaders.

In addition, on an annual basis a sample of all void properties will be post inspected by the Property Manager once the void repairs are complete and the property is deemed ready to let. This will help ensure the quality of all void works undertaken meet the required standards.

## **6. Equality and diversity**

The Langstane Group is committed to promoting equality and diversity across all areas of work. Discrimination or harassment of any kind is not tolerated.

If you would like this document in large print, please contact the Association on 01224 423000.