

POLICY TITLE	Void Management
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AUTHOR	Brian Trodden
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OFFICER RESPONSIBLE FOR REVIEW	Brian Trodden – Area Manager

VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY

1 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 As the main provider of affordable homes in Middlesbrough, Erimus Housing (Erimus) and Tees Valley Housing (TVH) 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.
- 1.2 Erimus and TVH will provide a cost efficient void repairs service which minimises rent loss, balances repair costs and turn around times with the provision of high quality homes and sustainable lettings.
- 1.3 Our policy will ensure that all properties let by Erimus and TVH meet the acceptable standards as contained within the Void Minimum Standard.
- 1.4 Erimus and TVH will ensure that we communicate effectively with both outgoing tenants to make sure that they understand their responsibilities prior to terminating a tenancy, and with prospective tenants to keep them informed throughout the void management process.
- 1.5 Erimus and TVH will adopt a flexible approach to encourage the occupation of specific difficult to let properties, and work proactively to address problems in areas of low demand.
- 1.6 This policy covers the following aspects of void management:
 - Ending tenancies (to include notice period management and compensation for improvement);
 - Security;
 - Void repairs;
 - Lettable standard;
 - Low demand property;
 - Creating new tenancies.

- 1.7 Details of the process and practical implementation of the policy are contained in supporting procedures. A summary of this policy is available to customers.

2 REFERENCE MATERIAL

2.1 External

Legislation and Regulation

- 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.

Guidance

- 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) Sustainable Lettings.

3 DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 There are no definitions required for this policy.

4 POLICY CONTENT

4.1 Ending Tenancies

- 4.1.1 All tenants are required to give written notice to vacate their property. The standard notice period is four weeks. The notice period for internal transfers is also 4 weeks.

- 4.2 In exceptional circumstances, Erimus and TVH may accept a shorter notice period, such as where a tenancy is terminated as a result of death and there is no successor, or where an internal transfer has been agreed and the transfer takes place before the end of the notice period.

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

- Agree any improvements 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.
- 4.4 Erimus and TVH 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 re-chargeable repairs if applicable.
- 4.5 Where a tenant hands in the keys prior to the termination of the Notice to Quit, Erimus and TVH 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.

Important – Note Comments: If the outgoing tenant fails to hand in the keys to the property by 12 noon on the date the Notice to Quit expires, the notice and rent liability will be extended.

- 4.6 Where the keys are not returned, the cost of gaining access to change locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant.
- 4.7 Where Erimus and TVH suspects a property to be abandoned, the statutory procedures will be followed as detailed in our tenancy management procedures.
- 4.8 On becoming available for letting, the property will be offered to a potential new tenant with the minimal delay in accordance with Erimus and TVH Homechoice Lettings policy.
- 4.9 Security
- 4.9.1 Wherever possible, Erimus and TVH will aim to introduce minimal and non-intrusive security on its properties, using a risk management approach to determine the appropriate level of security. This decision will be made jointly by Erimus and TVH and our void security contractors Orbis. The Risk Management Scheme is insurance backed and limits any financial loss to Erimus and TVH in the event that a void property is broken into and vandalised. All void properties are fully covered by this insurance two hours after a request has been made to Orbis by Erimus and TVH to secure the property.
- 4.9.2 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.

4.10 Void Repairs

4.10.1 Erimus and TVH 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 a high quality 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.

4.10.2 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.

4.10.3 Erimus and TVH will take account of the prospective tenant's preferences and choice when ordering repairs. Giving consideration to:

- The prospective tenants view 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.

4.10.4 Erimus and TVH may use the void period to bring forward any work that may cause major disruption to the incoming tenants, or may be difficult to undertake once the property is occupied, such as major or programmed improvement works.

4.10.5 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.

4.11 Managing Adapted Voids

4.11.1 Erimus and TVH recognises that properties suitable for individuals with disabilities are scarce, and Middlesbrough 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, Erimus and TVH will aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants with disabilities, and/or recycle any adaptations that are removed from a property.

4.11.2 Further details can be found within the Aids and Adaptations policy and procedure.

4.12 Lettable Standard

- 4.12.1 Erimus and TVH aims to create high quality, sustainable tenancies and achieve a high level of customer satisfaction. All properties let, will consistently meet the Governments Decent Homes standard and our own minimum lettable standard.
- 4.12.2 Our minimum lettable standard is developed in consultation with customers and is communicated widely to tenants and prospective tenants prior to viewing.
- 4.12.3 Where the decorative condition is poor, Erimus and TVH 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.
- 4.12.4 Erimus and TVH 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.

4.13 Low Demand Property

- 4.13.1 Erimus and TVH will offer incentives such as carpets, increased values of decorating vouchers, decorating rooms or other marketing incentives as deemed appropriate in order to encourage acceptance of properties identified as difficult to let, or areas of low demand housing.
- 4.13.2 Where analysis of refusals and terminations provides evidence that anti-social behaviour is affecting sustainability of tenancies, Erimus and TVH will proactively work with the Police and other enforcement/support agencies in order to tackle the problems.

4.14 Creating New Tenancies

- 4.14.1 All prospective tenants are provided with information about the property attributes, and local neighbourhood facilities prior to viewing as part of the Homechoice Lettings system.
- 4.14.2 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.
- 4.14.3 The sign-up process and settling in visit has a significant impact on the sustainability of tenancies. Erimus and TVH have supporting procedures to ensure effective measures are in place.
- 4.14.4 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 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 5.1 Erimus and TVH recognise that it operates in a community within which there is wide social diversity, and are committed to provided equal opportunities and valuing diversity.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 To enable all residents to have clear information and equal access to our available properties, Erimus and TVH publishes clear 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 customer's preferences or needs.
- 5.4 To help demonstrate our approach to managing empty properties is fully in-keeping with our equality and diversity aims and objectives, we collect equalities information on satisfaction with the void management process, the re-let standard and the quality of advice provided to prospective and existing tenants to feed into our monitoring and review processes.
- 5.5 Full details of our approach are set out in our Equality and Diversity Strategy.

6 CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 Erimus and TVH recognise the importance of working in partnership with our customers to develop and continuously improve our services and raise standards.
- 6.2 Erimus and TVH actively involves all customers in at the beginning of the decision making processes and ensure tenants are empowered to play a part in wider consultation and involvement structures, as detailed in full in our Resident Involvement Strategy.
- 6.3 To demonstrate this commitment, this policy:
- Will be reviewed in consultation with service users and customers;
 - Involves customers in the monitoring and testing of service delivery standards laid out in this policy and relevant procedures;
 - Publishes information in relation to performance against the aims and standards set down by this policy;
 - Will be developed and reviewed in light of customer feedback, comments and complaints.

7 POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

7.1 Monitoring

7.1.1 The monitoring of outcomes is essential for Erimus and TVH to track the impact of our approach to managing voids. Monitoring of the implementation of the Void Management policy and the associated procedures will consider the following at monthly intervals with quarterly analysis reporting to Committee:

- Targets set by Erimus and TVH for voids management;
- The performance against service standards and targets set out in the procedures;
- The cost of providing the void repairs and management service, and void costs as a combination of rent loss and void work;
- Customer satisfaction and level of complaints, reviews and appeals;
- Contractor performance in relation to quality and turn around;
- Void work will also be monitored in light of any subsequent responsive repair raised in the first six months of the new tenancy period by type of work and type of tenant.

7.1.2 Monitoring information will be reported to Erimus' Operations and Development Committee and publicised to customers on a regular basis.

7.2 Review

7.2.1 Monitoring results will be used by Erimus and TVH to inform future policy review in this area. All reviews will consider whether:

- The current policy adheres to legislative and regulatory requirements and reflects current good practice;
- The aims and objectives of the policy being met;
- The current policy outcomes meet the needs and aspirations of our diverse customer base;
- Service users are aware of and understand the policy and believe it to be consistent and fair;
- The policy provides sufficient choice for customers;
- The service offers value for money;
- Partnership arrangements are working effectively.

7.2.2 Overall monitoring and review of the policy will be undertaken in consultation with:

- Staff groups;
- Board members;
- Existing and future service users;
- Resident and community groups;

- Relevant partners, local voluntary agencies and other statutory services as relevant

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or in-line with legislative or legislative changes.

8 RESPONSIBILITY

8.1 The Chief Executive retains the overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

8.2 The Director of Housing is responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures. This includes responsibility for monitoring and review, staff awareness and training, policy development and communication to customers.