Void Policy
(Ref: HMPS01)

The purpose of this Policy is to outline how Manor Estates will seek to:

- Minimise loss of rental income due to properties being empty; and
- Bring empty properties to an acceptable standard for re-let as quickly as possible, ensuring that homes are available to those who need them.

Policy Monitoring Details	
Department:	Housing Management and Property Services
Author:	Alasdair Fraser and Stuart Yorkston
Status:	Group
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Updated:	
Planned Review Date:	April 2028
Regulatory Outcomes Being Achieved:	Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcome 4 – Quality of Housing *Social landlords manage their businesses so that: tenants' homes, as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), and any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat Standard.* Outcome 13 – Value for Money *Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that: tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.*
Tenant Consultation Required:	Yes
Equalities Impact Assessment	*Initial*
HRA Implications	Article 8 Right to Respect for Private Life, Family Life and the Home Article 14 Prohibition of Discrimination
Adherence with the Associations Values	This policy supports all the Association's values.

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1	**Introduction**	
	1.1	The aim of this Policy is to ensure that empty properties are re-let as quickly as possible to minimise loss of rental income and ensure that properties are available for those who need them. The Policy also seeks to maximise tenant satisfaction with the quality of their new home.
	1.2	▪ Successful implementation of the Policy will contribute to achievement of the Association's Strategic Objectives. We will provide homes that are sustainable, environmentally sound and accessible ▪ We will maintain and manage all properties and our open spaces to the same consistently high standard for all customers ▪ We will ensure our services are high quality
2	**Policy**	
	2.1	**Key Principles**
	2.1.1	For the purposes of monitoring and reporting, the Association will adopt the definitions and calculations used by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) as outlined in the Technical Guidance for completion of the Annual Return on the Charter.
	2.1.2	The Association will seek to follow good practice guidance and will undertake benchmarking with other organisations to learn from their experiences and improve processes where appropriate.
	2.1.3	There will be clear channels of communication between Housing Management and Property Services staff to ensure that all those involved in the processes: ▪ are aware of the status of properties that are empty; and ▪ are aware of the importance of, and are committed to, ensuring that properties are re-let as quickly as possible.

	2.2	**Pre-Termination Processes**
	2.2.1	Housing Management staff are responsible for the initial liaison with tenants seeking to end their tenancy, or with other relevant persons (e.g. relatives, support workers) where appropriate. See section 2.4 for further detail.
	2.2.2	Where notice of intention to end a tenancy is received, the Housing Officer and Technical Inspector will undertake an end of tenancy inspection. The purpose of this is to: ▪ Carry out an initial assessment of the extent of works likely to be required to bring the property to a lettable standard. ▪ Identify works that the tenant will be required to carry out prior to the end of the tenancy. ▪ Seek agreement with the tenant to repay any outstanding rent arrears; and ▪ Confirm if the property is likely to be suitable for viewing prior to the end of the tenancy. Where we identify unanticipated significant repairs or other issues during the initial inspection and the tenant is requested to carry out follow up work a further inspection will be arranged prior to the tenancy end date and carried out by either a Housing Officer or Technical Inspector depending on the nature of the works.
	2.2.3	The Association has an agreed **Exit Standard** (see Appendix 1) that tenants are expected to meet prior to ending their tenancy. Where the standard is not achieved, tenants may be recharged for any costs incurred by the Association when carrying out works that could reasonably have been done by the outgoing tenant.
	2.3	**Property Services Processes**
	2.3.1	Property Services staff will carry out an inspection of the property and instruct the contractor regarding necessary works as soon as possible after receipt of keys.
	2.3.2	As a minimum, the Association will aim to carry out all works required to comply with legislative requirements, specifically: ▪ Gas and electrical safety checks, ▪ EPC assessment if required; ▪ Asbestos checks; and ▪ Legionella tests.
	2.3.4	The Association has an agreed **Letting Standard** (see Appendix 2) that must be achieved prior to a prospective tenant being offered the property.
	2.3.5	The Association will carry out repairs required to the property prior to the incoming tenant receiving the keys. The exception being where minor repairs can be completed after the start of the new tenancy, with access arrangements made with the incoming tenant at sign up.
	2.3.6	While a property is void, the Association will only carry out works that would normally be part of a planned maintenance programme if:

		▪ The condition of the property does not meet the Association's Letting Standard; ▪ The works would normally not be carried out while a tenant was in situ; and a planned maintenance programme is imminent; ▪ The property features in the current planned maintenance programme. If a planned maintenance programme is due to be carried out within 1 year of the tenancy start date, the incoming tenant should be given appropriate advice and information on the expected timeframe for improvement and what to expect when work is carried out.
	2.3.7	Where major works are being carried out while a property is void, the time taken can only be excluded from the days to relet, (as reported in the ARC) if the work could not be carried out if the property was occupied. (For example, if it is work usually carried out while a tenant is resident, the time taken for similar work carried out in an empty property cannot be excluded).
	2.3.8	The Property Services Team will ensure the property meets the current SHQS (or EESSH) standard. If any aspect of the property will fall short of the standard the repair or upgrade will be undertaken in the void period or in agreement with the incoming tenant.
	2.3.9	On completion of works, Property Services staff should re-inspect the property to ensure it meets the Association's Letting Standard (Appendix 2). Where work has not been completed to a satisfactory standard, it should be returned to the contractor. All such incidents should be clearly recorded, monitored and discussed with the contractor in detail.
	2.3.10	Key Property Services processes are outlined in Appendix 3. Target timescales for these processes will be included in the procedures associated with this Policy. Where targets are not met, reasons should be clearly recorded and monitored, with action being taken as appropriate to address any issues identified.
	2.4	**Housing Management Processes**
	2.4.1	The approach the Association takes to dealing with different types of tenancy ends and identification of how the resulting vacancies are to be allocated, is outlined in the Allocation Policy and associated procedures.
	2.4.2	The majority of allocations will be made through EdIndex and properties should be advertised within 3 working days (or by next available void edition) following notification of tenancy end.
	2.4.3	Where properties are specially designed or have been adapted to accommodate specific needs, every effort should be made to identify an applicant who would benefit from the accommodation.
	2.4.4	A number of the key target timescales in respect of Housing Management processes are contained within the Allocation Policy and associated procedures but are summarised in Appendix 4. Where targets are not met, reasons should be clearly recorded and monitored, with action being taken as appropriate to address any issues identified.

	2.4.5	In accordance with the Allocation Policy, Housing Management staff will undertake post-allocation visits to new tenants within 4 to 6 weeks of the tenancy start date. ▪ Where issues of concern are identified, either at the point of allocation or at the post-allocation visit, staff will prepare a monitoring plan. ▪ Where no issues of concern are identified, and there has been no further contact, staff will contact the tenant by telephone after 6 months to check if there is anything they require further assistance with.
3	**General**	
	3.1	**Goods Left in Property, Including Common Stairs and Garden Areas**
	3.1.1	Where a property, garden, common stair and garden areas (for which the tenant has responsibility) have not been completely cleared of the tenant's belongings, the Association will arrange for these to be removed, and the tenant (or their estate) will be liable for the cost.
4	**Publicising This Policy**	
	4.1	This Policy will be available on the Association's website and a hard copy will be issued to anyone who requests it.
5	**Related Policies**	
	5.1	This Policy is related to: ▪ HM02 Allocation Policy
6	**Monitoring and Reporting**	
	6.1	The effectiveness of this Policy will be monitored through reporting on the following Key Performance Indicators: **Annual** ▪ Tenancies sustained for more than 1 year **Quarterly** ▪ Average number of days to relet tenancies; ▪ Contractor performance on completion of repairs in void properties; ▪ Percentage rent loss due to properties being empty; ▪ Complaints / negative feedback re condition of property at relet; ▪ Number and percentage of refusals/reasons for refusal

Void Policy **APPENDIX 1**

Exit Standard

At the end of the tenancy the Association expects that the tenant (or the tenant's representative) will:

- Empty the property of all furnishings, including floor and window coverings
- Remove all personal belongings from the property
- Remember to empty any attic and external storage spaces
- Ensure that all internal doors are in place
- Empty all kitchen cupboards and leave kitchen surfaces clear and clean
- Remove cooker – and where this is gas, ensure that the supply is capped
- Remove washing machine and turn off water supply
- Clean the bathroom
- Clean all windows
- Sweep and clean all rooms, ensuring they are free from rubbish
- Make sure that all rubbish is removed from the property and disposed of in the correct bins
- Ensure that all common areas are clear of any items that belong to them
- Arrange a special uplift of any bulky items no longer required, advising us of the collection date if after the tenancy has ended
- Ensure that any garden area associated with the property is left neat and tidy
- Remove any items – this includes sheds
- Arrange to give final meter readings to the utility provider and leave meter keys and cards in the property
- Return all sets of keys, including keys/fobs for common stair and storage spaces

Where a property has not been completely cleared of the tenant's belongings, the Association will arrange for these to be removed, and the tenant (or their estate) will be liable for the cost.

APPENDIX 2

Letting Standard

In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Association has a duty to ensure that a house is wind and watertight and reasonably fit for human habitation both at the beginning of a tenancy and throughout its term. The following minimum standard has been adopted by the Association:

Cleanliness

- The property will be in a clean and tidy condition.
- All surfaces, including woodwork and windows will be wiped, and floors swept.
- Baths, basins, toilets and showers will be clean, with water running freely.

Decoration

- Properties will be in good decorative order throughout with rooms in a clean condition and may be prepared for redecoration or alternatively a decoration pack will be offered to the new tenant.

Electric and Gas Services

- Metered electricity will be available.
- Metered Gas will be available if there is gas fired central heating or a gas fire.
- The gas meter is capped at the commencement of the void period. The gas safety check is carried out together with the recommissioning of the system when the new tenancy commences. A copy of the gas service record will be handed to the new tenant by the Gas Contractor.
- The property will have the facility for either a gas or an electric cooker.
- Meters will be read before occupation, and details recorded.
- Tenants will be responsible for setting up accounts and can switch to their preferred supplier at any time.

Electrical Services

- Electrical systems will be checked and certified.
- Electrical sockets, switches and pendants and extractor fans will be clean and free from cracks, paint or staining.
- Light fittings will be provided in every room.
- T V aerial / connections to a communal TV aerial, satellite aerials or distribution cables may be available if left by the outgoing tenant. Tenants will be responsible for checking the condition and arranging preferred supplier.

Heating and Water Services

- Mains water and gas stopcocks will be clearly labelled.
- All installations for the supply of hot and cold water, heating and ventilation systems will have been checked, will be free from blockages and in good working order.
- All radiators and storage heaters will be fixed securely.
- Arrangements can be made for boiler, timeclock, storage heater, or solar panel operating instructions to be issued. Tenants will be offered a demonstration when the gas service is recommissioned.

Detection Equipment

- All smoke, heat and carbon monoxide detectors will have been tested and replaced if necessary. The complete unit will have been renewed if required.
- The Association tests these annually, however tenants are encouraged to run their own regular tests, monthly as a minimum.

Windows
- Glass panes will be complete and free from cracks and significant scratches.
- All windows will be checked to ensure that they open and close properly and are secure.
- All window locks will be working and have keys.

Doors
- All flat / house entrance doors will be secure with door, surrounds, thresholds, and ironmongery in good condition.
- Glass panes will be complete and crack free.
- All external entrance doors will have a letter box. All letter boxes, spyholes and chains will have been checked and replaced if required.
- Door chains will not be permitted in retirement schemes due to the use of master key entry systems.
- Internal doors will be undamaged and in a presentable order with door, surrounds, thresholds, and ironmongery in good condition.

Keys and Locks
- One lock will have been changed on each of the property's ground floor entrance doors, or the main entrance door of upper flats (excluding retirement housing).
- Two complete sets of house keys will be supplied to the tenant.
- Keys will also be provided for the stair entrance door, back green door, bin store / pram store, car park, meter cupboard and window locks.
- Fobs will be provided for door entry systems, and for retirement housing to access the community building and laundry.
- Keys/fobs will be supplied with written identification labels.

Bathrooms
- Baths, basins and WCs will be clean and substantially free from chips, staining or burn marks.
- Where a shower is provided it will be in good working order and electrically safe.
- Shower screens or shower curtains will be provided. Shower screens will be clean and stain free with shower curtains renewed. Tiling and seals will be of a reasonable standard and tiling will be free from cracks and paint.
- Taps will be free to turn with washers in place.
- WC seats will have been replaced.
- Baths and wash hand basins will have a plug fitted.

Kitchens
- Sinks, worktops and units will be clean and free from grease, both inside and out, and substantially free from chips or staining.
- Tiling and seals will be of a reasonable standard, tiling will be free from cracks and paint.
- Taps will be free to turn, with washers in place.
- Sinks will have plugs fitted.
- All white goods will have been removed from property, except for built-in goods such as hob, oven, refrigerator or washing machine.
- A minimum of 1.0 m3 of enclosed storage space will be provided either in the form of traditional larder cupboard or fitted units.
- A washer / drier appliance will be supplied in certain modern complexes where traditional garden drying facilities are not available.

Stairs / Steps / Handrails
- All stair and step treads / risers will be level and free from trip hazards.
- All banisters will be in place and securely fixed.
- Internal balustrading will be sized in line with child safety requirements.
- Any handrails or grab rails will be fixed secure.

Flooring and floor coverings

- All floorboards will be level and free from trip hazards.
- Floor coverings in wet floor shower rooms will be clean and free from any rips or significant staining.

Insulation / Energy Efficiency

- Gas boiler or electric storage heating system will be less than 20 years old.
- Attic spaces will have a minimum of 270mm insulation and tanks and pipes will be insulated.
- Hot water cylinders, where available will have tank jackets. Cavities will be insulated.
- Where insulation does not meet this standard, the property will be placed on an existing programme, and upgrade work will be undertaken within an agreed timescale.

External Works

- External painter work will be included in the Associations regular cyclical programme.
- The roof and flashings will be in good condition, structurally sound and watertight, with no evidence of slipped tiles or slates.
- Gutters and downpipes will be free from blockages. If plant growth is visible the property will be added to the existing gutter clearance programme and work will be undertaken within an agreed timescale.

Gardens

- For new tenancies, footpaths, walkways and allocated bin stores, will be swept and clear of refuse, garden and contractors' debris.
- During the growing season grass will have been cut during the void period or up to 4 weeks post tenancy sign-up.
- Trees and shrubs will not cause blockage to any footpath, walkway or be overgrown into neighbouring properties.
- Gates, if provided, will be checked to ensure they open and close properly and are secure.
- Fencing, if provided, will be a continuous boundary demarcation with no sharp extrusions on either side.
- Clothes poles or a rotary drier hole shall be in place and secure.

Tenant Alterations

- Permission should be sought for any alterations to the property.
- The Association operates a scheme to award compensation for certain specific improvements, at the end of a tenancy. Detailed conditions apply and are listed in the Policy on Compensation for Improvements.

APPENDIX 3

Property Services – Key Processes

Action	Timescale
Pre-termination notice: 1. Check status of EPC, Asbestos report, planned maintenance of main components 2. Request Asbestos report 3. Check alterations & improvements granted and adaptations	} Within 1 working day } } } }
Pre-termination inspection: 1. TI to attend pre-termination inspection	*As requested*
Receipt of keys from Housing Management: 1. Fit key safe, take meter reads 2. Where debt on meter - arrange credit for meters 3. Access for asbestos certification, if necessary	Within 1 working day *Minimum 1 working day* *2 working days minimum to 8 working days*
Undertake Void Pre Inspection: 1. Gas termination visit and Energy Performance Certification (EPC) if necessary 2. Inspect and instruct void works and set void décor pack (or agree specific allowance) 3. Instruct Contractor, electric check, any property clearance works and all void works including supply LED lightbulbs	}Within 1 working day } } } Within 6 working days *(additional time required if property clearance)*
Agree and instruct any additional Planned Maintenance works	*Timescale to be agreed – Property Services and Contractor and Housing Management notified*
Final inspection of Contractor Works: 1. Inspect and accept contractor works / return of property 2. Confirm property meets Letting Standard 3. Take meter reads, arrange display of EPC and removal of key safe 4. Keys returned to Property Services and void signed off	}Within 1 working day } } } } *(additional time required if Contractor Works are not satisfactory)*
Return keys to Housing Management: 1. Return keys 2. Clarify recharges on previous tenancy	Within 1 working day
Specific information to new tenant: 1. Information relating to utility supplier 2. Information relating to Asbestos 3. Any programmed works and agree timescales 4. Any future work programmes 5. Release void décor pack information	Prepared for allocation date

Update Asset Database: 1. Electric Check 2. EPC 3. Component Upgrades	Pass information to the PCCC within 1 working week of void works inspection PCCC to update asset database within 1 working week of receipt of data
Monitor: 1. Gas recommission date	Until new tenant has instructed

Note: varying timescales will apply where:

- Asbestos certification has been requested
- Property clearance is required before void contractor works can commence
- Planned maintenance works such as gas central heating or kitchen upgrade are required on the void period
- Contractor fails to perform the works satisfactorily or within timescale

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Housing Management – Key Timescales **APPENDIX 4**

Action	**Timescale**
Respond to notification of termination	Within 1 working day
Pre-termination inspection	Within 5 working days
Advertise property	Within 3 working days (or by next available void edition)
Shortlist	Within 1 working day of edition closing
Interview/preliminary offer	Within 3 working days
Viewing	Within 3 working days of key return (or before key return if access available)
Sign-up	Within 5 working days of key return

Note: varying timescales will apply where a tenancy is terminated without 4 weeks' notice being received (for example, where the tenancy end is due to death or keys are returned without notice)