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## **EMPTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT (VOIDS)**

### **1.0 Policy Statement**

South Lakes Housing aims to achieve a cost effective, high quality empty property management service that meets the high standards expected by our customers, safeguards the condition and value of the housing stock and protects the environment.

### **2.0 Strategic Links**

- South Lakeland Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2028
- South Lakeland Corporate Plan
- Cumbria Housing Strategy 2006/11
- SLH Procurement Strategy

### **3.0 Key Policy Standards**

South Lakes Housing will:-

- maximise rental income for all properties managed by South Lakes Housing;
- ensure that all properties meet a minimum standard and comply with legal health and safety requirements;
- minimise the length of time properties remain empty;
- ensure principles of best value are adhered to in the management of empty properties.

#### Quality Letting Standard

All properties managed by South Lakes Housing will be inspected within two days of becoming vacant in order to ensure that :-

- the property is secure and that the keys provided fit all the locks to the external doors and stores (if it is suspected that other keys to the property have not been returned, the locks will be changed);
- the property is weatherproof;
- gas and electric safety checks are carried out and servicing of gas appliances;
- there are no obvious defects which present an immediate safety hazard;
- all doors and windows open and close properly, and glazing is in order;
- all sanitary ware is checked for soundness, cleanliness and flushing;
- all floors, staircases, ceilings and walls are checked for defects;
- all kitchen units are checked for defects;

- the property is checked for infestation of pests, and if necessary appropriate action is taken to disinfect;
- any alterations carried out by the former tenant are checked to ascertain whether they are safe and acceptable for a new tenant, and rectification works are identified and dealt with;
- an assessment of decorative order is made;
- any other repairs due to fair wear and tear are noted and dealt with;
- any other repairs due to acts or omissions of the former tenant are noted.

The maintenance surveyor will prepare a list of works required to be carried out by the Voids Team in accordance with the quality letting standard and will define the status of the property as one of the following:-

#### **Category A**

Gas and electrical checks and cleaning only (target turnaround two working days)

#### **Category B**

Gas and electrical checks, general cleaning and minor works (target turnaround five working days)

#### **Category C**

Gas and electrical checks, general cleaning and intermediate works e.g. renewal of sanitary ware, kitchen units, etc. (target turnaround fifteen working days)

#### **Category D**

Major works e.g. new kitchen, new bathroom, rewiring, central heating installation, etc. (target undetermined)

Tenants will not be allowed access if the property is unsafe and not allowed unaccompanied access until the property is ready to let.

Properties will be considered to be unavailable for let if one or more of the following repairs is required or the property is to be sold, demolished or used for decant purposes:-

- Rewiring;
- Replacement of all kitchen fittings;
- Replacement of bathroom suite;
- Extensive plastering required (principally living room and kitchen);
- Space and/or water heating needing replacement immediately;
- Major structural work;
- Removal of asbestos;
- Substantial roofing works;
- Wet rot, dry rot or severe damp requiring investigation;
- Major adaptations;
- Installation of essential services;
- Fumigation.

#### Pre-transfer inspection

Pre-transfer inspections must be carried out before a tenant is considered for a transfer. Unless their home would likely be classified as a Category A void, approval for a transfer

should be deferred and the tenant notified of what needs to be done prior to a transfer being approved. In such circumstances, a re-inspection must be carried out once the tenant advises that the requirements have been met.

### Pre-void Inspection

Where a tenant has given the required notice to terminate a tenancy, a pre-void inspection will be carried out prior to the property being vacated to check:-

- damage to the property;
- alterations carried out by the tenant;
- adaptation work to the property;
- services to the property;
- general condition of home and garden.

The maintenance surveyor will notify the tenant of any potential recharges and any work the tenant needs to carry out prior to vacating.

### Damage by Tenant

The tenant is responsible for any abuse of or damage caused to the property and will normally be recharged for the cost of resulting work. In the case of accidental damage, South Lakes Housing will consider the circumstances in deciding the level of charge appropriate.

### Re-decoration

Internal decoration of homes is a tenant's responsibility. When void works are carried out at a property, however, damage to decoration may occur (although SLH will always try and ensure any such damage is kept to an absolute minimum).

Where such damage occurs and the new tenant or a household member is able to decorate, SLH will provide a decoration voucher or decoration card to enable the new tenant to purchase decoration materials from participating local retailers (the room by room decoration allowance is set annually).

Where such damage occurs and all prospective household members are over 80 years of age or have disabilities that prevent them from being able to redecorate, SLH will offer to carry out decoration works as appropriate and without charge in the main living areas (living room, kitchen, main bedroom).

### Condemned gas fires

Any condemned gas fires will be removed prior to a new tenant moving in and will be replaced with an electric fire if desired.

### Post-inspections

Post inspections will be carried out on a sample of finished re-lets by a maintenance surveyor and a tenant void inspector prior to occupation in order to check that the quality letting standard has been met.

### Letting

On becoming available for letting, the property will be offered to a potential new tenant in accordance with South Lakeland District Council's Allocations Policy.

#### 4.0 **Quality Management**

SLH operates a quality management system to the BS EN ISO 9001:2000 Standard that is verified by a recognised Certification Body, ISOQAR Limited.

Quality assured procedures relating to this Policy have been written and appear as follows:-

- QS18 Lettings Process - Dwellings (Quality Procedures Manual)
- QS21 Relet Inspection (Quality Procedures Manual)
- RVPR.2 Lettings - Dwellings (Quality Assurance Manual)
- RVPR.5 Issuing Keys (Quality Assurance Manual)
- RVPR.6 Voids (Quality Assurance Manual)
- RVSF.29 Quality Letting Standard (Quality Assurance Manual)

#### 5.0 **Key Targets and Performance Indicators**

- Average number of days taken to re-let dwellings
- Percentage of rent loss through empty properties
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with overall re-let service
- Percentage of offers of tenancy accepted
- Compliance with quality letting standard

#### 6.0 **Monitoring, Review and Consultation Process**

- Reports will be made to the Board, South Lakeland District Council and the Tenants` Committee identifying performance against targets on a quarterly basis
- Consultation with tenants and tenant representative groups
- Consultation with other relevant agencies
- Weekly void team meetings

#### 7.0 **Service Development and Review Priority**

Changes to the service may take place as the result of the work of relevant Service Improvement Groups with tenant representation. The policy will be reviewed at least once every three years to ensure that it is meeting the current needs of the community, and to ensure that it takes into consideration any changes to legislation at any given time.

#### 8.0 **Equality and Diversity**

South Lakes Housing recognises that there is a broad range of visible and non-visible differences that characterise its tenants. Some of these qualities include race, religion, culture, nationality, ethnic background, colour, disability, sex, sexual orientation, age, literacy and income level. By understanding and respecting this diversity it is able to set a policy which ensures that all tenants are able to access services provided by South Lakes Housing in an equitable manner.

South Lakes Housing is committed to providing information and services equally and without discrimination so that they meet the needs of all sections of the community who are either housed by South Lakeland District Council, living near properties managed by South Lakes Housing or seeking access to or information on housing services in the South Lakeland area. In carrying out all housing management policies, South Lakes Housing's Equality and Diversity Policy will be adhered to.