



Three Oaks Homes

<i>Title</i>	<i>Voids Policy</i>
<i>Scope</i>	<i>This policy applies to Three Oaks Homes</i>
Author	Policy Task Force
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VOIDS POLICY

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1.0 POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.1** The primary objectives of Three Oaks Homes (TOH) Void Policy is to:
- ensure that the period of time which properties are vacant between termination of tenancy and reletting is minimised;
 - maximise rental income and the availability of affordable housing;
 - in respect of newly built or acquired homes, it is our aim for these to be let straight after handover, to ensure that the Association's rental income is maximised and vandalism minimised;
 - provide an accessible, equitable, customer focussed service.

To meet these objectives we are committed to:-

- providing clear guidelines and procedures to co-ordinate the responsibilities of various groups of staff in dealing with empty properties
- having clear targets for action to be taken at each stage of the process from termination notice to reletting
- encouraging tenants to give proper notice by providing a tenancy termination form and a leaflet on tenancy termination procedure and responsibilities
- ensuring consistency of service provided with regard to voids throughout the Association
- regularly monitoring voids to ensure that the Association's objectives are being met and where necessary improve the procedure. This will be undertaken by Blaby District Tenants' Federation (BDTF) or equivalent on a monthly basis. BDTF will select voids to be inspected at various stages throughout the process.
- Negotiate with builders of new homes for permission to undertake accompanied viewings during the week prior to handover.
- Adopting a Lettable Standard, that has been agreed with tenants and is made available to prospective tenant before they view the property.

2.0 GENERAL ISSUES

- 2.1** Void control is a key housing management and maintenance task which must be given priority by individual officers. Sufficient time should be set aside each week to deal with voids.

- 2.2** It is important that accurate records are kept throughout the void period with regard to the whereabouts of keys, offers, refusals etc. and to achieve this, the computer system should be used, together with the appropriate monitoring forms/key logs.
- 2.3** Staff should approach void control work in a professional manner, taking into account the particular circumstances of each vacancy, but adopting a fair and consistent approach without prejudice or bias.
- 2.4** The (post yet to be determined) is responsible for voids from termination of tenancy to reletting and will liaise with staff in other departments and external agencies to ensure the properties are let as quickly as possible. However, (post yet to be determined) are responsible for meeting the target times set for turn around of voids.
- 2.5** It is the responsibility of the (post yet to be determined) to ensure that all Housing Management staff; and the responsibility of (post yet to be determined) to ensure maintenance staff, are trained in TOH policy and procedure for dealing with voids.

3.0 TERMINATION OF TENANCY

- 3.1** TOH has developed a leaflet for tenants about moving home and this should be given to the tenant. This leaflet gives advice and guidance on the condition tenants should leave their home in, including incentive payments for tenants who leave their home in a satisfactory condition, the criteria of which is determined by TOH. The leaflet also provides information about improvements tenants have made and whether compensation may be payable for these. It also gives practical advice about change of address notification, turning off stop taps and gas and electricity and so on.

4.0 RECEIPT OF KEYS

- 4.1** On receipt of the keys the property will be inspected and a decision made regarding the payment of any incentives or compensation (see section 3.1 above).
- 4.2** TOH has adopted a 'Lettable Standard' which determines the minimum standard a property should be let at. A property inspection will assess work required to meet this standard.
- 4.3** The void inspection will also determine whether any rechargeable repairs are required.
- 4.4** Locks will be changed on all properties where there are not suited locks within 24 hours of the tenancy terminating.
- 4.5** Where there are suited locks additional keys will have been signed for by the out-going tenants. Three Oaks Homes will therefore be in a

position to account for all keys issued. If suited keys are missing, then locks should be changed in order to protect the security of the incoming tenant.

- 4.6 In relation to the replacement of locks, TOH will adopt a risk management approach, balancing the need for security against value for money considerations. However, the general overriding principle will be that if potential security risks are identified, security should take precedent over value for money considerations.

5.0 SELECTION OF A NEW TENANT

- 5.1 The Lettings Policy provides the framework for the selection of a new tenant and whether a property is to be filled by a nomination, waiting list or transfer applicant. In making this decision reference should be made to any nomination agreements for the local authority in whose area the vacancy arises, or site specific nomination agreements.

6.0 VIEWING OF THE PROPERTY

- 6.1 Once the applicant or nomination has been offered the property an arrangement should be made to view the property.
- 6.2 If the property is of particularly “poor” quality and major works are required to make it lettable the (post yet to be determined) should use their discretion as to at what point the property is “viewable”. In exercising this discretion, staff should consider potential levels of demand for the property (i.e., difficult to let properties should be in the best possible condition before viewings are arranged in order to reduce the risk of refusal). In some cases too early a viewing may result in a higher refusal rate which can significantly affect void rates and vacancy periods.
- 6.3 If offers of accommodation are made before major works are carried out on the empty property, wherever possible the incoming tenant should be offered choice over any fixtures or fittings being provided.
- 6.4 Accompanied viewing should be carried out in all cases. During the viewing the (post yet to be determined) should provide the prospective tenant with a copy of the Lettable Standard. The prospective tenant will have the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the property and the (post yet to be determined) will have the opportunity to “sell” the property to the applicant, if necessary.

7.0 ACCEPTANCE/REFUSAL OF OFFER

- 7.1 Once the property has been viewed by the applicant/nominee they should be asked to decide whether they wish to take the property. Applicants/nominees may be given up to 48 hours to consider the

offer. Any longer than this must be authorised by the (post yet to be determined).

7.2 In all cases, if an offer is made, the applicant/nominee should be given a draft copy of the tenancy agreement. Good practice dictates that a decision on whether to accept an offer of accommodation cannot be reasonably made if the applicant/nominee is not aware of the rules of the tenancy they are signing for.

7.3 If a property is refused for being in poor physical condition the specific reasons are to be recorded and a re-inspection must be arranged. If the condition of the property is found to fall below TOH's lettable standard it should be brought up to that standard without delay. The applicant who refused the property should then be given the opportunity to reconsider the offer. The original offer will not be counted as a refusal of a "reasonable offer" under the lettings policy.

8.0 TENANCY START DATE

8.1 Wherever possible, prospective tenants should be given the opportunity to view the property prior to it being handed over to housing management for letting (subject to health and safety). This is to give them time to consider the offer being made to them. The tenancy start date should normally be the next available Monday after the offer is made and accepted. If sign ups are carried out on a Monday or Tuesday the start date should be the Monday of that specific week. The following Monday should be used if viewing is carried out later in the week.

8.2 The sign up process must be followed to ensure that all necessary documentation relating to the tenancy is completed and to ensure that the tenant understands their obligations.

8.3 Following the creation of a new tenancy the Policy and Information Section will issue a New Homes Questionnaire (see appendix one) that will ask residents how they found the whole process of their tenancy selection, sign up and post tenancy visit.

9.0 MONITORING OF VOIDS

9.1 Void reports will be reviewed regularly and performance is reported to TOH Board of Management, the EMH Group Performance Review Group, BDTF and to tenants via the newsletter.

9.2 Monitoring may include:

- Void loss
- Void turnaround times
- Difficult to let
- Void repairs costs

- Refusals as a result of unacceptable standards (i.e. those properties that applicants refuse as they consider they are not up to an acceptable standard for reletting and where a return inspection has been undertaken).
- Tenant Quality Monitoring Visits

10.0 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

10.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Voids Procedure
- Lettable Standard
- Allocations Policy
- Transfer Policy

11.0 POLICY REVIEW

11.1 The Voids Policy will be reviewed every three years or when changes to service delivery or legislation require it, whichever is sooner.