



Void Policy

March 2024

MONITORING, APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
Lead Officer / Author	Ady Brierley
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Approved by	EMT
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Review Frequency	The Policy will be reviewed every three years or in line with legislative or regulatory changes. Due March 2027.

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1 Policy Purpose

1.1 This Policy sets out the way in which First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) will end tenancies and repair and let properties. The aims of the Policy are to:

- Minimise the length of time that a property is empty and restrict the amount of rental income lost and costs incurred.
- Maximise the notice period where appropriate to reduce relet costs and proactively minimise delays to the void process.
- Let the property in a clean and safe condition that meets the Your New Home standard.
- Meet customers' needs and maximises their satisfaction.
- Provide a value for money service.
- Make best use of the void period to meet our investment requirements in line with the Asset Management Strategy.
- Meet our statutory, regulatory, environmental and compliance requirements.

2 The Policy Details

2.1 Ending Tenancies – the Start of the Void Process

2.1.1 All customers are required to give FCHO due notice that they intend to terminate their tenancy in line with their Tenancy or Licence Agreement conditions.

2.1.2 The notice period is usually four full rental weeks. The last day of the tenancy will be a Sunday. The customer must inform FCHO that they have vacated the property by noon on the Monday after the tenancy end date otherwise a further week's rent will be charged.

2.1.3 Where notification that a property has not been vacated the cost of any legal action and associated costs will be re-charged to the outgoing customer.

2.1.4 Where the property is not vacated and handed back to FCHO then the property will be transferred to a 'Use and Occupation' account where charges for use and occupation will be charged to the outgoing customer until the matter is resolved.

2.1.5 If the outgoing customer does not leave the property and garden in an acceptable condition (i.e. in line with the Your New Home Standard), any damages or works that are identified during the pre-termination assessment and will be discussed with the outgoing customer and the remedial action agreed. If the property condition has not improved when the tenancy ends the customer will be recharged in line with the FCHO Recharge Policy. This may include items that were not initially identified during the pre-termination inspection.

2.1.6 All customers will be reminded of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy and the condition of the property following notice being given. This will include the arrangements in relation to the keys and the formal handing back of the property to FCHO.

2.1.7 All customers that give notice will be asked to complete an End of Tenancy Satisfaction Survey. This enables FCHO to better understand their reason for leaving, their views on our properties and services and what we can do to improve service delivery.

2.2 Inspections

- 2.2.1 The re-let process will commence immediately on receipt of notice.
- 2.2.2 Wherever possible a pre termination assessment report of the property will be arranged with the outgoing customer in order to get an early assessment of property condition both inside and out. All properties will be attended & assessed when the tenancy ends to determine what action is required to re-let the property. This may include but is not limited to the following:
- To determine the condition of any aids and adaptations and to advise if they are to remain or be removed.
 - Identifying if the property is suitable for a direct let.
 - Identifying and agreeing where possible any recharges with the customer.
 - Agreeing any improvements which are eligible for compensation for new customer or possibly need removing and reinstating.
 - Determining if the property requires major works and possibly component replacements.
- 2.2.3 The customer will also be advised of the status of their rent account and agree payments to clear any outstanding debts before the tenancy end date.

2.3 Repairs to Void Properties

- 2.3.1 A repairs inspection will be carried out in line with the lettable standard and repairs will be categorised in line with the Void Management Policy.
- 2.3.2 To ensure consistency, the inspection of empty homes will be undertaken by trained, competent dedicated void maintenance inspectors. All properties will be assessed against a lettable standard checklist at pre-inspection and will also be checked and signed off for quality and assurance following completion of works at post inspection.
- 2.3.3 All essential works will be completed whilst the property is empty. In certain cases, some works may be completed after the new customer has moved into the property.
- 2.3.4 All empty homes will have the necessary health and safety checks completed and will be issued with electrical and gas safety certificates and an EPC in compliance with our legal requirements as part of the sign-up process.
- 2.3.5 Health and safety works that will cause a high level of disruption or put safety at risk, such as the removal of asbestos, or damp and mould treatments will always be completed when the property is empty and prior to the start of the new tenancy.
- 2.3.6 On completion of the works a further inspection will take place to ensure the property meets the agreed lettable Standard. Any unsatisfactory works will be rectified.
- 2.3.7 All void properties will be checked against the planned works programme to make the most cost-effective investment decisions in line with the Asset Management Strategy. Component replacement may take place at void stage or as an opportunity for the new customer to select things such as worktops, tiles.

2.3.8 When a property has been refused 3 times or more and there is no shortlist it is deemed to be 'Difficult to let' and additional works may be required. This will be discussed at the FCHO Void Review Group and considered on an individual basis.

2.4 New Lettings

2.4.1 All new tenancies will be offered in accordance with the current Lettings Policy and in line with any agreed nominations arrangements.

2.4.2 The tenancy will commence after all essential repairs and safety checks have been completed and on the day that the customer agrees to the conditions of the tenancy. This may be carried out in person or digitally, depending on the needs of the incoming customers.

2.5 Roles and Responsibilities

2.5.1 The Lettings Team is responsible for making provisional and full offers of accommodation to customers.

2.5.2 The Repairs Inspectors are responsible for carrying out inspections to the property the inspector will assess and order any routine works, component replacements, carry out safety inspections and post works inspections following completion of the works.

2.5.3 The Compliance Team is responsible for checking that asbestos works, electrical, legionella, gas safety checks and EPC inspections are carried out and providing any necessary certification. They are also responsible for ensuring the heating to properties is decommissioned and tested and recommissioned after the new customer has moved in.

2.5.4 The Property Care Team is responsible for completing and managing the repair works, completing safety checks and cleaning the property.

2.5.5 The Neighbourhood Care Team is responsible for any maintenance to the garden identified during the pre-termination inspection or whilst void.

2.5.6 The Neighbourhoods Team is responsible for determining the level of security to a property in consultation with the Community Legal Services Manager.

2.5.7 The Neighbourhood Co-ordinator is responsible for managing and monitoring void properties in their respective patches. This includes carrying out quality checks as part of the viewings and sign-up process following completion and post inspection of works by Property Care. As part of the sign-up process the Neighbourhood Officer will ensure the customer is provided with all relevant property information and safety related certification.

2.6 Void categories

2.6.1 Voids performance will be monitored across all void properties.

2.6.2 Some properties may require larger scale, higher value works which may include component replacements such as kitchens and bathrooms, rewires, licensed asbestos removal, planning, etc. to bring them up to the Your New Home Standard.

- 2.6.3 There is a hierarchy of controls in place to manage high cost works to ensure any investment within our stock is consistent, and provides value for money which is in line with the organisations wider investment and asset related investment plans and strategies.
- 2.6.4 Following inspection should the value of relet works exceed £5k this will be assessed and authorised by the Void Repairs Manager. Voids that require component replacements are reviewed with the Asset Strategy team based on remaining life data. Should a void repair value exceed £10k at the point of order, this will be approved by the Head of Property Care.
- 2.6.5 **Policy voids** – properties that require an option appraisal due to either high void costs, are difficult to let or there are issues with regards to long term sustainability based upon the Asset Performance Evaluation Assessment will undergo an option appraisal. Policy voids will also include properties where specialist or complex works such as remodelling or structural works are required which may involve Planning or Building Control. These properties will be overseen by the Void Review Group. Bespoke target dates will be agreed for each property based upon the complexity of the issue.
- 2.6.6 All voids will remain on debit and will be reported within the Performance Indicators and will be closely monitored.

3 Monitoring Performance

- 3.1 Void performance is monitored on a daily basis by the relevant Neighbourhoods, Property Care and Lettings teams. An Operational Void Working group will meet weekly to review all voids. The group will discuss any operational issues and update and agree any actions that will assist with the management and performance of the voids against targets. The Void Operational Group reports to the Void Review Group. Details of all void properties and associated performance information are reported weekly to the Executive Team.
- The Void Review Group meets monthly to review overall performance and to identify areas for improvement along with any key updates and issues to specific properties or processes.
 - Satisfaction with new tenancies is measured via touchpoint surveys which are monitored to ensure customer satisfaction meets the agreed KPI targets.
 - The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Operational Performance Indicators (OPI) are monitored on a monthly basis and Key Performance Indicators are reported to the Board via the quarterly performance report.
- 3.2 The table below contains the performance measure. The aim is to constantly improve performance and these targets will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the Business Planning process. The following measures are reported at the Investment and Development Committee and assessed and reviewed on an annual basis.
- Number of days to turnaround a property
 - % Total Void Loss
 - % overall Customer satisfaction
 - % customer satisfaction with the condition of the property

- % customer satisfaction with the cleanliness of the property

4 Legislative or other Guidelines

- 4.1 As a registered provider of social housing, FCHO's provision to customers is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. Revised Consumer standards and Code of Practice take effect from 1st April 2024, alongside the commencement of a new approach to consumer regulation. The new Regulatory Standards introduce a new 'Safety and Quality Standard' which sets the expectation that Landlords will 'maintain tenants' homes so that they are safe and of a decent standard and provide a quality service'.

5 Links to the Corporate Plan and Strategic Risk Register

- 5.1 The Voids Policy links to the 'Great Homes' strategic objective and following priority:
- We will provide high quality, safe, sustainable homes that meet housing need today and are fit for the future.
- 5.2 The Policy links to the following strategic risks:
- SR 8 – Health and Safety Compliance (asset / landlord / colleague)
 - SR 13 – Environmental Sustainability