

Void Control and Allocations/Nominations Module Table of Contents

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Void Control And Allocations/Nominations Module

Equal Opportunities Statement: We are committed to the promotion of equality for all in the application of these policies and procedures and we will therefore work towards the definition of equality of opportunity as set out within the Scotland Act 1998 which states that “Equal Opportunities” means the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions.

Risk Management

Where the policy and procedural steps outlined are properly implemented the risk attached to the policy is assessed as being medium. All elements of the allocation procedure must be carried out in accordance with policy guidelines and the statements on equality of opportunity. Where policy and procedure incorporate legislative requirements, they must be followed in all cases.

Risk Assessment Medium

Introduction

The effective allocation of our housing is an important part of our service to customers. The allocations policy has been designed to meet the housing needs of applicants. We have adopted a fair system that can be understood easily by those that use it.

In formulating and reviewing the policy and procedures the Association has sought the views of service users. We also consult with individual tenants and tenants groups in line with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. In particular the policy and procedural provisions are intended to ensure that the organisation meets its commitments regarding equality for those people using the service. By meeting applicants requirements in terms of housing need and also their personal aspirations the policy assists to create sustainable tenancies and communities.

There is also a direct link between the efficient handling of empty houses and the general effectiveness of the Association and its business activities. Dealing with empty houses in an efficient manner reduces the rent lost by the organisation. The creation of sustainable tenancies reduces the number of empty properties and therefore minimises expenditure in this area. Through the use of the allocations and empty house works procedures the Association offers housing that is of a high quality which continues to be in demand.

This module provides guidance for both staff and the Board on the strategy, policy and procedures that have been adopted by the organisation. A summary of the allocations policy is available for service users to ensure that the services provided are easily understood and widely distributed.

The module takes account of statutory, regulatory and good practice requirements that are relevant to the policy and procedure for example:

The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987
The Human Rights Act 1998
The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
Civil Partnerships Act 2004
The Disability Discrimination Act 2005
Part 5 of the Shire Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement
Chapters 1 and 7 of Raising Standards in Housing (Allocations and Maintenance)
Performance Standards for Registered Social Landlords, and all the relevant
Guiding Standards that underpin these Activity Standards.
SEDD Circular 1/2001 Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 – Housing lists and allocations

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the property re-let process is the efficient management of all aspects of the process that will in turn fulfil the following specific aims and objectives:

- To ensure that the voids and allocations process provides effective mechanisms that allow the organisation to minimise rent loss through voids.
- We will work with the local authority and other social landlords to identify and address housing needs
- The Association aims to make its allocations service one that is socially inclusive which as a minimum allows any member of the community to apply for housing, have their circumstances considered by the organisation and have their application registered on the housing list.
- To employ a range of identification and support processes that enable the Association to deal with issues such as difficult to let properties and to provide the necessary support to customers taking up tenancies with the organisation.
- Make an effective contribution to the objectives set out within the Local Housing Strategy.
- Work in partnership with other local housing providers to set up and participate in a Common Housing Register within East Ayrshire.
- To provide high quality accommodation to applicants who are in housing need as defined within this module. Accommodation that we provide should be suited to the applicants needs and as far as is possible the applicants stated preferences will be taken into account when offers of housing are made.
- The requirements of disabled applicants will receive particular attention in providing subject to financial constraint adaptations at the start of a tenancy to meet their specific needs.
- It is recognised that the Associations stock profile is currently best suited to provision of accommodation to mainstream general needs applicants and the policy reflects this. The organisation will, however, continue to monitor specific

needs and trends in relation to housing demand and will as far as is possible address these issues at the annual policy review and also within other policies and activities relating to housing provision.

- The Association will ensure that the procedures associated with the voids and allocations module provide an effective and efficient service which ensures that applicants are given clear information concerning their prospects for housing and also enables the relet process to be completed quickly therefore benefiting both applicants and the organisation.
- That the Associations equality and Diversity policy is applied throughout the allocation process. See Equality and Diversity within Corporate Governance Manual.
- To offer a complete range of housing options to customers and maximise access to the Associations stock through the effective operation of nominations arrangements with the local authority.
- Contribute to the alleviation of homelessness by fulfilling the organisations obligations under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and by using the allocations policy and procedures to identify and prioritise potential cases of homelessness.
- To maintain a range of effective monitoring and reporting tools that will inform the monitoring and review process.

Part One - Policies

Allocations

Section 1 - Our System for allocating Housing

The Association has adopted a consolidated list that uses a points system to identify the housing needs of applicants relative to each other. The points that can be awarded and the reasons for the award are set out in the procedural section of this module. Once applicants have been placed on the waiting list in the appropriate position, allocations are made subject to the provisions set out in this policy document.

Section 2 - Law and good practice

The Association will follow all of the necessary legislative requirements that govern the allocation of housing by Registered Social Landlords. This includes giving reasonable preference to those in housing need taking account of equality and diversity issues and consulting service users on the development and review of the policy. Examples of current legislation are given in the introduction however the situation will be regularly reviewed to ensure that the organisation remains compliant with current legislative requirements.

Section 3 - Access to Housing

The Association operates an open housing list, which enables individuals, either solely or jointly to apply to the organisation for housing, and have their circumstances assessed against the provisions within the allocation policy.

All individuals aged 16 years or over are entitled to lodge an application for housing with the Association and have their application placed on the waiting list.

At the point of application we send applicants information about the Association and the allocations system, this includes information about the points system.

We assess individual housing applications and place them on the waiting list. This is done within 5 days of receiving completed applications. We then advise applicants in writing of their points award.

As well as its housing list the Association operates a nominations agreement with East Ayrshire Council. Nominations are requested for 50% of all vacancies occurring within the Associations housing stock, which therefore enables applicants to the Councils waiting list to apply for housing with the Association.

The Association makes available advice and assistance to anyone requiring guidance as to their options to apply for housing within the area. We liaise with other organisations and agencies to ensure that information provided is accurate and up to date. A copy of East Ayrshire Housing Options Guide is also made available for the use of customers. The guide contains the contact details of housing providers within the area together with information on the type of housing they supply. Other information within the guide relates to services provided to homeless people and the contact details of council offices.

Section 4 - Benefits for Staff and Committee Members

Under Part 1 of Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 employees and Board members must not put themselves in a position where their duties and personal interests conflict with those of the Association.

Employees, former employees who have ceased employment within the last twelve months together with Board members and the close relatives of both groups are not able to benefit from their connection with the Association except for certain areas permitted by Part 1 of Schedule 7 and it is the Associations policy to ensure strict compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulators guidance on this subject.

Where allocations are made to persons who may or will fall within the Schedule 7 definitions, the allocation will be made solely on the basis of housing need as defined within the allocations policy.

Allocations and nominations that fall within the scope of Schedule 7 will be reported to the Board who are required to approve the granting of tenancy or other permitted

benefit. In granting approval the Board will satisfy themselves that clear audit trails exist to support the granting of tenancy in accordance with the Associations allocations policy before any offer is made to the prospective tenant.

Section 5 - Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information provided by applicants will be treated in strictest confidence and will be kept in accordance with current data protection legislation and the Associations terms of registration.

Only those staff that require to use such information on an operational basis to fulfil the allocations function will be authorised to have access to applicant's details.

Members of the Associations Board will have no access to individual's details on any occasion. In the unlikely event that an individual case requires to be the subject of a report to the Board all material will be provided on an anonymous basis, or with the explicit agreement of the individuals concerned.

Requests for access to information will be dealt with in accordance with the Associations Data protection policy however applicants for housing are able to view their application details at any time, to ensure accuracy or to make any required changes.

Section 6 - Disability, Medical Adaptation and Rehousing

Wherever possible the Association wishes to enable tenants to remain in their own homes if they so wish. Where necessary and practicable the organisation will adapt a tenant's home to enable them to continue living there.

It is however recognised that some applicants will require to move and where this is the case the association will seek to suitably adapt their new home. This policy also applies to non-tenant applicants who may require adaptations to allow them to enjoy suitable living conditions.

Section 7 - Monitoring and Review

Through our performance monitoring we wish to achieve the highest standards of service and efficiency. Procedural aspects of the allocations service will therefore be monitored on a regular basis with the results being reported to the Board who will satisfy themselves that performance against set targets and quality of service are being maintained.

Section 8 – Nominations

The Association has a nominations agreement with the local authority which allows for 50% of vacancies to be made available to the Council in order that they may nominate applicants from their own housing list. Such nominees will be assessed against the Associations allocations policy to ensure that housing need exists prior to an offer being made. All other qualifying criteria and general rules within the Association policy applies equally to both direct applicants and nominees.

Additional Information Sources:

Nominations Agreement between Shire Housing Association and East Ayrshire Council

Homeless Protocol Agreement.

Section 9 - Homelessness

As a major provider of quality rented homes the Association recognises that it has a significant role to play in the reduction of homelessness within its areas of operation.

The organisation also recognises that homelessness can take many different forms from those who are roofless to individuals or families who do not have their own secure accommodation or those that are threatened with homelessness for various reasons.

Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on all Registered Social Landlords to provide accommodation for statutorily homeless people if requested to do so by the local authority. The Association will ensure that such requests are complied with unless there are good reasons as specified within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 for not doing so.

In accordance with the Homeless Protocol Agreement the organisation will assist the Council to house homeless people by way of accepting nominations of statutory homeless determinations. The mechanism for dealing with such nominations is set out within the Protocol Agreement between East Ayrshire Council and all relevant landlords within the area.

This will normally mean the provision of a Scottish Secure Tenancy for the applicant in question except where the applicant has had an order for repossession granted against them within the last three years on grounds of anti social behaviour or they are the subject of an anti social behaviour order. In such cases the Association will consider the use of a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy.

The Association will ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to allow the effective operation of formal arrangements agreed with the Council and that monitoring and arbitration protocols are agreed and in place.

Other mechanisms we will use to ensure that the organisation makes a constructive contribution towards the reduction of homelessness will include:-

- Where possible the Association will directly address issues of homelessness within its own stock, for example, to instances of fire or flood
- Use the organisations allocations policy to identify applicants who are homeless or potentially homeless and point such applicants in a realistic manner which affords the opportunity to gain permanent secure accommodation.

- Keep all systems under review and use current information to monitor the effectiveness and appropriateness of current practices.
- Ensure that all applicants and nominees for housing are dealt with in accordance with the organisations policy on equal opportunities, and any other arrangements within the homelessness protocol agreed with the Council.
- Have mechanisms in place, which allow people seeking accommodation to be advised of their options for housing.
- Seek to develop a wider network of contacts throughout Ayrshire with a view to creating greater choice and more diverse options for housing applicants.

The above arrangements will be the subject of half-yearly reports to the Board.

We will also participate in the Homelessness Forum along with other local partners and provide feedback and where necessary training for both the Board and Staff.

Where possible we will provide positive input to the Council's Homelessness Strategy and participate actively in initiatives that may benefit the organisations potential customer base and the local community.

Section 10 - Tenants with Particular Needs

It is Shire Housing Association's policy to ensure that purpose built and specially adapted houses are tenanted by an individual or family with particular needs.

The purpose of the procedure contained in Part 2 is:-

- i) outline good practice for ensuring that houses that have been built or adapted to suit tenants with particular needs can be relet to appropriate tenants in order to allow the Housing Management Section to meet its care in the community objectives;
- ii) explain Shire Housing Association's rights, as a landlord, to seek authority from the courts to rehouse a tenant or occupant who does not require the adaptations or special design features of the property, subject to the succession rights of occupants that are set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Section 11 - Delegation of Authority to sign SST'S

It is the policy of Shire Housing Association Limited that the Director may delegate to a nominated member(s) of staff the authority to countersign Missives of Let on behalf of Shire Housing Association Limited.

The procedure within this module should be followed to ensure a written record is maintained of the member(s) of staff authorised to sign Missives of Let on behalf of Shire Housing Association Limited.

Part Two - Procedures

Allocations

1 At Termination of Tenancy

On receipt of notice of termination of tenancy the Lettings Officer will take the following steps.

The IBS system will be updated to record the pending void property which will trigger the void management process held within the system. All key dates must be added to the system at the appropriate time to ensure the accuracy of target dates generated by the process.

Determine if the void will be allocated via the nominations process or from the Associations waiting list. The number of nominations to be requested from the Council is currently set at 50% of all vacancies and the allocation of voids will therefore alternate between the nomination process and the housing list. Where a nomination is to be requested the necessary actions should be undertaken (see nominations procedures).

Where it is apparent that the alternation of requests for nominations is resulting in an imbalance of the house types or geographic areas submitted to the council, the practice may be varied on the authority of the Director or Head of Housing Management following receipt of reports/information from the Lettings Officer. The main objective of such variances would be to maximise the successful outcome of each nomination request. The overall target of 50% of vacancies should not be affected by any variation in the order of requests.

A statement of account taken and a letter issued to the outgoing tenant advising them of termination date (28 days from receipt of letter), the rent due, the return date of keys and the date of visit to carry out the pre-termination report.

A consent form relating to the termination of tenancy must be signed by the husband/wife, partner or civil partner at this time. Appropriate advice concerning occupancy rights will also be given when required.

A pre-termination report form is completed by the Lettings Officer at the pre-termination visit, which will usually be completed within **3 Days**.

Immediately following the return of keys from the outgoing tenant the Ibs system will be updated to record receipt and the void will be processed according to the procedures set out in the void management section of this module.

2 Applicant Selection Process

There are three routes by which applicants will be offered housing by the organisation:-

- Through direct allocation by the Association using its own housing list
- By nomination through the agreement with the Council. (see nominations).
- By nomination under the Section 5 protocol agreement (homeless persons) between the council and the Association.

3 Direct Allocations

Properties not directed to the Council for nomination will relet using the Associations housing list. Properties will be allocated to the first eligible applicant at the top of the housing list requesting the size, type and location of the available property.

Applicants will be categorised as to their points total and a further identifier as to their tenancy status added.

The target percentage of vacancies to be let to association tenants will be dictated by the Lettings Plan and will be achieved by directing the appropriate number of vacancies to tenants in a fixed order. For example a 20% tenant target will result in every 5th vacancy being directed to a Shire Housing Association tenant. Deviation from this process must be authorised by the HHM and the audit trail must show clear reasons for such deviation. This process is again designed to ensure that particular vacancies are not directed to any specific group or individual within the housing list but also recognises that some tenants will wish to move home. In all cases the Association will maintain a clear audit trail for allocations and nominations made.

4 The Housing Waiting List

The Associations housing list is divided into two sections. In the first section or group the organisation keeps the details of all applicants who do not currently have tenancy of a Shire Housing Association property. The second section or group contains the application details of existing tenants of the Association and is termed the Transfer List.

All applications are assessed against the housing need criteria set out in this document and the appropriate number of points are awarded to each case. Where applicants qualify for points, which relate to several different housing needs e.g. medical and overcrowding, the points will be added together to give an overall points total.

Thereafter each application will be placed on the Housing List in the appropriate position according to the point's assessment.

5 Verification of Process

All application forms will be subject to a secondary check of the points assessment with the application header being countersigned by the officer undertaking the check. A summary of the points that have been awarded will be added to the applicants' notification of registration and an initialled copy put on the application folder held within the office.

6 Applicant Preferences

An applicant may indicate various preferences on their application form, which include the size and type of accommodation required together with preferred options for heating type and location. There is no restriction on the number of alterations made to any given application.

The maximum number of areas for which an applicant may be considered at any given time will be five, although applicants may indicate that they wish to be considered for all areas where the Association owns housing should they so wish.

Applicants must keep the Association advised of any changes to their circumstances, failure to do so may invalidate their application or lead to any offer of housing being withdrawn.

7 Monitoring Process

All applicant selections will be made in accordance with the policy and procedural guidance and will be recorded in the allocations register. Each selection will be countersigned by the Head of Housing Management or in his/her absence by the Director. The purpose of this process is to ensure that all offers are made in accordance with the established procedure. Further audit provision is available through the computerised management system, which indicates the actions taken by individual system users.

8 Making offers

Where possible the Lettings Officer will make verbal offers either in person or via the telephone, to ensure that the offer process is undertaken as quickly as possible. In all cases a letter confirming the applicants decision regarding the offer will be issued. Where telephone contact is not immediately possible the standard offer letter will be issued. All applicants are requested to respond to offers within two working days after which time the offer will be deemed to be refused if no response has been forthcoming from the applicant.

9 Appeals Procedure

Whilst every effort is made to maintain the highest levels of service the Association recognises that there will be occasions when dissatisfaction with decisions may lead to the need for an appeals process to be used.

Applicants will have the right to appeal with regard to any aspect of policy or procedure, which they feel, may have been wrongly interpreted or applied to their case.

In the first instance any appeal will be considered by a senior officer (but not the Head of Housing Management) who will review the original decision and advise the appellant accordingly.

Should dissatisfaction still exist a second stage review will be undertaken by the Director with the result of this review again being communicated to the appellant. Should the appellant still be dissatisfied with the decision following review the matter will be referred to the Board of Shire Housing Association whose decision will be final.

The above procedure does not affect the right of the appellant to make representation the Public Services Ombudsman should they remain dissatisfied with the way in which their case has been administered after following the Associations full appeals procedure.

10 Allocations Policy General Rules

Applicants for housing must be 16 years of age or over.

Applicants who the Association believes may have knowingly and recklessly provided false or misleading information that would be material to an offer of housing being made will be required to submit a new application. Until the applicant has submitted a new form which has been reassessed the Association will not make any offers of accommodation.

Review of the Housing List

The Association will review all applications on an annual basis. Applicants who do not return relevant information indicating that they wish to remain on the housing list will be cancelled 28 days after the original review date.

The review will take place on the anniversary of the original date of application. An initial review letter will be issued to applicants that will then be followed up with a reminder letter fourteen days later. If no response is forthcoming from the applicant within the seven day period following the issue of the reminder then the application will be cancelled.

Cancelled applicants are free to reapply to the Association at any time.

Size of Accommodation

Applicants will be allocated accommodation of a size, which is most suitable for their needs. Accommodation will not be allocated to an applicant where the offer would create a situation of overcrowding.

The Associations stock profile of mainly 4 apartment properties means that there will be occasions when the house allocated is larger than that actually needed by the applicant. Where the Association is unable to offer accommodation of a size suited to the applicants needs assessment a larger property will be considered.

Where tenants who have been allocated properties larger than were required by their needs assessment choose to re-register onto the housing list no points allocation will be made on grounds of under occupation for a period of three years. Should there be a material change in the applicants circumstances which leads to the requirement for smaller accommodation the application may be awarded under occupation points sooner. Examples of such changes may include new medical conditions or mobility difficulties.

Where such allocations are made the applicant will be advised of the restrictions placed on any re-application for housing.

Suspension of Applicants

The Association does not operate a suspensions policy for applicants and all applications will therefore remain live within the system at all times. This system is designed to ensure that applications are always considered for suitable vacancies subject to their position on the housing list.

Shire Housing does however, reserve the right not to make an offer of housing where an applicant fails to meet the provisions within the policy relating to rent arrears or previous antisocial behaviour.

Offers of accommodation will also only be made where all relevant information that relates to the application has been received and any reasonable enquiries being made by the Association have been fully completed.

Applications will be regularly assessed to ensure that information and other policy requirements are met. Where an application is not being actively considered due to outstanding information, rent arrears or previous record of antisocial behaviour, the applicant will be informed of the position in writing together with any actions that the applicant may be required to take to rectify the position.

Should an item of information prove to be unobtainable, for example a tenancy report, the matter will be referred to the Head of Housing Management who will decide if the requirement for the information is to be waived. Prior to an offer being made.

9 Rent Arrears

The existence of rent arrears attributable to an applicant whether they be from a current or former tenancy will not influence the application where –

- The arrears owed are less than one months charge or
- There is an arrangement in place with the landlord in question to repay outstanding arrears and

that payments have been made in accordance with the agreement for at least three months and that the applicant is continuing to made such payments.

Where the above criteria are not met the Association reserves the right not to action the application until such time as the applicant is able to fulfil the requirements.

10 Anti Social Behaviour

Where an applicant is found to be the subject of an Anti Social Behaviour Order or has had an order for recovery of possession granted against them for anti social behaviour, the Association will consider the use of Short Scottish Secure Tenancy, following the relevant guidance set out within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Applications will be regularly monitored to ensure that their current 'status' remains correct and that applicants who are eligible for consideration for housing are always included in the selection process.

11 Refusals

Applicants will not be penalised for refusing an offer of accommodation, however, should an applicant refuse three offers of accommodation the Association will interview the applicant to ascertain their exact requirements and refine their application accordingly. In such circumstances the applicant will be made aware of the limited chances of gaining alternative accommodation should their choice of accommodation or area be overly restrictive.

12 Emergency Housing

Where emergency situations arise which require immediate rehousing the Director will authorise departure from the normal system of allocations and alternative housing will be made available on a temporary or permanent basis as and where it is deemed to be appropriate. Examples of such situations are homelessness due to fire or flood. In cases of intimidation or harassment the Association will seek the advice of other agencies such as the Police, Social Work Department and Medical practitioners. Where the Association believes there to be a risk to the safety of individuals or families the Director will authorise an offer of emergency housing to be made. Recipients of emergency housing offers do not require to be pre registered on the housing list but would be expected to accept the offer provided that it is suitable to their needs.

13 The Points Scheme

The following points are available to all applicants and will be awarded according to applicants circumstances and housing needs.

a) Medical/ Needs

Applicants who wish their medical condition to be considered as part of their housing application are required to complete the necessary questionnaire which will be forwarded to the Community Medical Officer for independent assessment. The following points will be allocated dependant on the assessment received from the CMO.

CMO Assessment Score	Points on application
0	0
1	5
2	10
3	15
4	20

Medical points are awarded on the basis that any medical condition may be assisted through the allocation of alternative housing. The assessment is independent of the Association and is undertaken by a medical professional.

The Association wishes to make the best use of its available housing and the facilities it can provide. When it is established that applicants require specific medical adaptations to assist mobility the following points will be awarded.

3 points per type of adaptation required

Examples of adaptations are walk in showers, ramps or handrails.

As part of its commitment to ensuring that all applicants are able to access housing in all areas the Association will consider the addition of medical adaptations to void houses where appropriate and subject to resource availability. The organisation will also continue to adapt tenanted stock and where the need for adaptation is identified from a housing application the matter will be referred to the appropriate staff for further investigation and possible action.

To ensure a consistent approach to the need for and the installation of adaptations the Association will use the Occupational Therapist referral mechanism. The process will involve either a self-referral by the applicant or an agreed referral by the Association to the Occupational Therapy Department.

Such referrals will be made in sufficient time to allow the recommendations made by the OT to be acted upon and to allow the necessary points to be assessed

b) Overcrowding

Overcrowding points will be awarded to applicants where the number of bedrooms required exceeds the number that are available. The following criteria will be used to assess the number of bedrooms required by the applicant. Family or household needs are considered in the round.

For each bedroom deficiency applicants will be awarded. **5 points**

Separate bedrooms are required for:-

- Family or household needs are considered in the round
- Applicant (and partner where applicable)
- Children of opposite sex
- More than 2 children
- Individuals over 16 who are not siblings

Occupancy Table

The following table indicates the size of house that applicants can be considered for.

Household	Size of Property
A single person	Bedsit 1 or 2 bedroom*
A couple	1 or 2 bedroom*
Household with one child	2 bedroom*
Household with 2 children of same sex	2 bedroom*
Household with two children opposite sex	3 bedroom
Household with three children	3 bedroom
Household with four or more children	4 bedroom

* Where the Associations housing does not permit the allocation of the size of house indicated due to the stock profile, applicants will be considered for accommodation that is larger than their current needs subject to the provisions set out within this policy.

NOTE

The Association now has within its stock a number of properties that contain rooms with only single bed spaces e.g. 4 apartment 5 person properties. Where such properties are allocated, only applicants who fit the size of house without causing overcrowding will be considered.

c) Underoccupation

Underoccupancy points will be awarded where there are unused bedrooms within the property. Occupancy standards will be assessed in the same way as for overcrowding.

i.e. for each bedroom assessed as Surplus to requirements

3 points

Properties lacking basic facilities:-

Where an applicants existing accommodation has one or more of the following characteristics an award of 12 points will be made.

Lack of water supply in kitchen
No WC within the house
No bath or shower
No satisfactory facilities for cooking found
Penetrating Dampness

The Association may carry out a technical inspection to satisfy itself that a property suffers from penetrating dampness.

Applicants Sharing amenities with friends/relatives:-

Sharing livingroom	1 point
Sharing kitchen	2 points
Sharing bathroom/wc	3 points

Applicants in hostel/hotel or similar accommodation and sharing amenities will receive the following points:-

Sharing bathroom/wc	4 points
Sharing kitchen	3 points

d) Tenure Security

Applicants who are homeless or potentially homeless may qualify for tenure points. This may apply where the applicant has been served with a valid Notice to Quit and further legal action for recovery of possession is ongoing or the applicant is required to relinquish their current accommodation due to the expiry of a short term lease or the temporary nature of the accommodation. Examples of accommodation which may attract tenure points include but are not limited to:

- Homeless Hostels
- Bed and breakfast accommodation
- Women's aid refuge
- Social Work Group Tenancies
- Other residential institutions
- Nurses homes
- Residents of tied accommodation

Applicants awarded points in this category will receive:- **15 points**

Applications from People Leaving the Armed Forces will be granted insecurity of tenure points provided that confirmation of the date of discharge is provided with the application and that date falls within a period of six months from the date of application.

The Association will also act on nominations received from the Council whether made under section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 or not.

e) Relationship Breakdown

Applicants who are threatened with homelessness due to relationship breakdown and will have custody of dependant children under 16 years of age will receive:-

12 points

f) Harassment

The Association will thoroughly investigate claims of harassment in accordance with the organisations policy on dealing with such cases. A victim centred approach will be adopted and where it can be reasonably verified that harassment exists which could potentially lead to personal injury or damage to property and the victim wishes to consider alternative accommodation, applicants will receive:-

25 points

g) Anti-Social Behaviour

Applicants who wish to move due to the behaviour of others will have their case investigated. Where the claims can be verified through investigations undertaken as part of the anti social behaviour policy and procedure and there is no apparent danger of violence or injury applicants will receive:-

10 points

Note: applicants will only be eligible for harassment or anti social points no applicant will receive points in both categories.

h) Domestic Violence

The Association will treat all reports of domestic violence in a sensitive manner and will operate a victim centred approach when dealing with such cases. The organisation will always deal with cases of domestic violence in a strictly confidential manner to ensure the safety of the applicant. No information concerning the applicant will be released or sought without the express permission of the applicant. Assistance and advice in respect of the applicants housing options will be provided in accordance with the Associations policy on domestic violence. The above provisions also apply to individuals in same sex relationships. Victims of domestic violence will be awarded:-

25 points

The above points award will remain in place irrespective of the applicants temporary housing circumstances.

i) Custody Orders

Applicants with residential access orders but do not have sufficient space within their existing accommodation to exercise this right will receive:-

2 points

Applicants who would otherwise be able to exercise custody orders but for a lack of acceptable accommodation will also receive an award of:-

2 points

Nominations

Nominations for vacancies will be requested for alternate properties as dictated by the termination of tenancy date.

This ensures that the spread of housing for which nominations are requested is to a set pattern rather than at the complete discretion of individual staff members. Any deviation from the process to accommodate for example particular needs of an identified applicant will be agreed in conjunction with the local authority.

Whenever applicable a nomination request form is completed with void date, address of property, type and size of property, heating type and appropriate accessibility details relating to the property and faxed to East Ayrshire Council within 24 hours of receiving the termination notice from the outgoing tenant.

Whenever appropriate initial details can be obtained over the telephone and confirmed by fax/email.

The nomination monitoring report should be updated at this stage. The address of the property, termination received date, Local Authority notified date, number of working days and void date to be completed.

a) Receipt of Nomination from East Ayrshire Council

On receipt of nominations from the Council the following steps should be taken:-

The nominations monitoring sheet should be completed, giving details of Nomination received date, number of working days taken, and the pre-let visit.

The IBS system will also be updated with all relevant information.

A Nomination Visit Form is prepared by the Lettings Officer prior to visiting the nominee. A rent allowance form should also be completed at the nomination visit and retained until tenancy start date.

The above action will be taken on receipt of the nomination.

b) Offer of Tenancy

The Lettings Officer will carry out the nomination visit usually within 2 days.

In cases where the nominee cannot be contacted to allow a nomination visit to take place the Council will be advised of the situation and that the nomination has been deemed to be a refusal.

Following the nominations visit the Lettings Officer will undertake any further investigations that arise as a result of the interview. Where no further issues arise the Lettings Officer will:-

- Make a verbal offer to the nominee and obtain their acceptance/refusal of the offer. Where appropriate this will be followed up by the issue of a confirmation offer letter. The letter will advise the prospective tenant of the proposed tenancy commencement date, the full rental for the property and the appointment time for the completion of the SST Agreement.
- When the Tenancy Agreement has been signed the Local Authority is notified immediately by fax that the property has been relet.
- The tenant and rent account is created on the Open Housing System.
- Council Tax at Greenholm Street, Kilmarnock and AJVB, Ayr are informed of the change in tenancy.

c) Refusal Of Nomination

If any material fact comes to light during the nomination process which would lead to the Association refusing a nomination, e.g. anti social behaviour, current or former tenancy arrears that are not covered by the provisions set out within Section 10 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Lettings Officer will advise the Council of the refusal on the prescribed form. The refusal must be endorsed by the Head of Housing Management or Director.

Procedures for the refusal of nominations made under the Section 5 Protocol agreement are covered within that document and should be referred to if the need arises.

d) Refusal by the Nominee

If the nomination is refused:-

- a) Nomination refusal form is completed and faxed to the Local Authority immediately.
- b) The IBS system updated to include reasons for the refusal.

All the paperwork is then scanned in house file.

A second nomination may then be requested in accordance with the procedure set out in this Section and the point at which the vacancy re-occurs within the allocations cycle.

Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting

The Association will collect data on issues such as the number of nominations received together with success rates and reasons for refusals. All such data will be regularly analysed with any issues affecting policy or impacting on resources being reported to the Board. Overall trends will also be included within lettings plans on an annual basis.

Payment of Decoration Allowances

At the start of a new tenancy and in some other limited circumstances, for example as part of contract works, the Association will pay the new or existing tenant an allowance towards the cost of re-decoration.

Scale of Allowances

Redecoration

The maximum redecoration allowances are as follows:-

Living Room	£80
Kitchen	£70
Dining Room	£60
Bathroom	£70
Additional WC	£35
Hall	£65
Hall/Staircase Combined	£130
Bedroom (each)	£60
Additional Hall or Stair	£65

Procedural Steps

- Step 1** The Lettings Officer will assess the level of decoration allowance to be paid to the prospective tenant, taking in to account the condition of the void property. The allowance will be made up of individual room payments in line with current scales- checks if applicant/tenant has bank account to allow payment by cheque.
- Step 2** Completes the decoration allowance request form for authorisation.
- Step 3** Senior officer to authorise payment.
- Step 4** The Lettings Officer should assess whether payment is full sum or incremental to ensure redecoration is carried out.
- Step 5** The request is passed to finance to issue cheque.

- Step 6** A copy of heating / decoration allowance form to be kept in Housing Management files.
- Step 7** If a new tenant, the Housing/Lettings Officer must visit to ascertain whether tenant has moved in before handing over payment.
- Step 8** Housing Officers should check at settling - in visit for new tenant whether redecoration has been effected.

Minor Contract Works

The Head of Housing Management will maintain responsibility for the assessment of minor work allowances using the general scale of allowances. Allowances will only be payable where deemed appropriate.

Information to New Tenants (Allocations and nominations)

The new tenant package to be prepared for completion.

- a) copies of Scottish Secure Tenancy
- b) 1 copy of Scottish Secure Tenancy Summary
- c) Census Form
- d) Payment Plan Agreement
- e) Standing Order Form
- f) Membership Application
- g) Key Receipt Form
- h) Notification of Charge
- i) Defective Housing Letter
- j) Service Record from repairs
- k) SCORE Form
- l) New Tenancy Confirmation
- m) Complaints procedure
- n) Tenant Handbook if applicable
- o) 2 Copies of Good neighbour agreement
- p) Tenant alteration form
- q) Commitment to Quality

Satisfaction Survey forms

The Association issues satisfaction survey forms at two stages of the Allocations process. All applicants are issued with an application survey which measures the quality of service associated with the application process. The second survey is issued to all new tenants and is intended to seek feedback on the allocations process itself and the customers views on the way in which their expectations have been met. Reports on the outcomes of the survey process are made available to the Board on a six monthly basis.

Mutual Exchange

1. On receipt of each application the Lettings Officer will enter the appropriate details into the Exchange Register.

Each rent account is to be checked by the Lettings Officer to ensure no balance is outstanding. If either account is in arrears a letter will be issued to tenant to advise that the exchange cannot go ahead until the balance has been paid in full.

2. A home visit will be carried out by the Lettings Officer or appropriate Housing Officer once the rent accounts and tenancy commencement dates have been checked. These visits should be carried out within 3 working days. If at the visit the exchange would cause overcrowding in terms of either the Association's occupancy standard or statutory requirements the application will not be processed further and the applicants advised of the Associations decision.
3. Following the visit the Lettings Officer will write to the non-Association tenants landlord (if applicable) requesting a full tenancy report on their tenant and give a tenancy report on the Association's tenant. This should be carried out within 1 working day from completion of the home visit forms.
4. On completion of the appropriate investigations the Lettings Officer will pass the file to the Head of Housing Management for approval/refusal. File to be returned within 1 working day.

NOTE: All investigations must be completed within the one month time limit to allow determination letters to be issued.

5. Where the exchange is to be refused the Lettings Officer will advise each party in writing. The reasons for refusal will only be indicated to the applicant to which they pertain.

Examples of reasonable grounds for refusal of an application are:

- A Notice of Intention to Repossess has been served on either applicant on grounds set out in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Schedule 2 Of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- An order for recovery of possession has been granted against either applicant
- The house was provided in connection with the tenant's employment
- The house is designed and extensively adapted for occupation by a person with particular needs and if the exchange took place, there would no longer be a person with such needs occupying the house.
- The exchange would lead to overcrowding or be significantly larger than that required by the tenant and the tenant's family as assessed in line with existing policy.
- The accommodation is not suitable to the needs of the tenant or their family.

- Where there is a legal order in force such as an ASBO that prevents the applicant from living within the area within which the exchange property is situated.

Where the application is approved the Lettings Officer will:-

- a) Contact the non-Association tenants landlord to arrange a suitable date for the exchange to become effective.
- b) Where both applicants are Shire Housing Association tenants determine the exchange date and advise both applicants accordingly. Further advice should also be issued in respect of the possible effect on each applicants right to buy and checks undertaken to ascertain if there is any eligibility for compensation for improvements.
- c) Issue termination of tenancy letters to the Association's tenant(s) together with consent forms relating to the termination of tenancy, which should be signed by the husband/wife, partner or civil partner and returned to the Association prior to the exchange date. No mutual exchange can take place without the consent form being signed.
- d) Issue letters to the incoming tenant(s) advising of the tenancy start date and also that the Association will not be liable for redecoration and repair or replacement that falls within the tenant responsibility or has not been attended to by the outgoing tenant.
- e) Arrange an appointment to sign a Tenancy Agreement with the new tenant(s).
- f) Advise the Repairs Section of the tenancy change and request that electrical and heating safety checks (gas & solid fuel) be done on each tenancy within the associations ownership.

Tenants with Particular Needs

a) Legislation

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Houses Covered by the Legislation

Houses which have been purpose built, those which have been adapted and those which have had major conversions carried out are covered by the legislation. The number, cost and extent of the adaptations or conversions as well as the location of the property should be considered when deciding whether or not a house is suitable for relet to a tenant with special needs. Discretion should be used by all involved.

b) Recourse to the Courts

Whilst it is desirable for Shire Housing Association Limited to ensure that specially built or adapted properties become available for relet and we do

have the legal means to rehouse occupants of such properties, recourse to the courts should be seen as a last resort. If at all possible agreement to end the tenancy of that property should be reached through negotiation and by ensuring that the offer of alternative accommodation meets the occupants needs.

c) *Advising the Tenant(s)*

Prospective tenants who have been nominated for a purpose built or previously adapted property should be advised at the time of making an offer of the conditions in relation to future occupation should the disabled person leave the household for any reason. This should be done in writing and a signature obtained to confirm this.

Existing tenants who qualify for substantial adaptations should be advised, prior to work commencing, of the conditions in relation to future occupation should the disabled person leave the household for any reason. This should be done in writing and a signature obtained to confirm this.

d) *Offering Alternative Accommodation*

If a property is no longer occupied by the disabled person then the Head of Housing Management should first ensure that the property is required by a person with those particular needs and start negotiations with the family to rehouse them. The Head of Housing Management will identify a suitable alternative property. In the event of court action, Shire Housing Association Limited would have to prove that "suitable" alternative accommodation has been offered to the family. Part 2 of Schedule 2 of the "Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 defines what would be considered to be suitable alternative accommodation".

This whole process is likely to be a sensitive one, and is largely one of negotiation with the household. It is in Shire Housing Association's interest to ensure that the property is available to a tenant with particular needs so there should be some measure of give and take when negotiating with the present occupant. The Head of Housing Management should consider making more than one offer of alternative accommodation if it is felt that is required in the circumstances.

e) *Court Action*

Court action will only be considered where the property has undergone substantial adaptations. A list of permanent adaptations which should be considered as substantial, either on their own or combined with others is provided for guidance at Annex 3.

Should negotiation with an occupant prove unsuccessful then the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives Shire Housing Association Limited and other public sector landlords the opportunity to recover properties which are designed or adapted for special needs under grounds 11 and 12 of Schedule 2 part 1. These are:-

Ground 11

The house has been designed or adapted for occupation by a person whose special needs require accommodation of the kind provided by the house and –

a) there is no longer a person with such special needs occupying the house;
and

b) the landlord requires it for occupation (whether alone or with other members of his family) by a person who has such special needs.

Ground 12

The house forms part of a group of houses which has been designed, or which has been provided with or located near facilities, for persons in need of special social support, and –

a) there is no longer a person with such a need occupying the house;
and

b) the landlord requires it for occupation (whether alone or with other members of his family) by a person who has such a need.

Shire Housing Association Limited must offer suitable alternative accommodation if they are seeking to rehouse a tenant under either of those grounds. Part 2 of Schedule 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 defines suitability of accommodation.

Before any court action staff should take care that:

- the adaptations to the house are substantial enough to warrant such action **and**
- an offer of suitable alternative accommodation has been made to the occupant of the property to be recovered, **and**
- a potential applicant or family with particular needs has been identified for the property.

In the above circumstances the Association does not have to satisfy the reasonability test usually applied by the court provided that suitable alternative accommodation is available for the tenant and family at the date when the court order ending the tenancy takes effect.

Delegation Of Authority To Countersign SST's

1. Delegation of Authority

- 1.1 The Board, on the advice of the Head of Housing Management will decide which members of staff are given the authority to countersign

tenancy agreements on behalf of Shire Housing Association Limited. The records must be reviewed annually and amended with each change of designated staff. The Board will approve signatories at the post AGM august meeting and any staff additions due to staff changes at any time.

- 1.2 The tenancy agreement is a legal document and members of staff who sign them on behalf of Shire Housing Association Limited are carrying out an important and responsible task. They must ensure that the conditions of let contained in the tenancy agreement have been fully explained to the tenant and that he/she has been made aware of the legal responsibilities which Shire Housing Association Limited will have and those which he/she as a tenant will have under the terms of the agreement.
- 1.3 The Head of Housing Management ensure that appropriate members of staff are given the authority to sign tenancy agreements. In addition it is important to ensure a sufficient number of staff have authority to sign tenancy agreements to cover for any absences.
- 1.4 Both copies of the tenancy agreement should be signed simultaneously and one copy returned immediately to the tenant.

2. Maintaining Records of Signatories

- 2.1 It is the responsibility of the Head of Housing Management to ensure that a written record is maintained of the members of staff with delegated authority to countersign tenancy agreements. This record which is required for audit purposes must be kept up to date and should include the name and job title for those with such authority.
- 2.2 The Director has ultimate responsibility for ensuring a written record of the members of staff with delegated authority to countersign missives is maintained.
- 2.3 The Director should receive a duplicate of the records noted at 2.1.
- 2.4 A copy of the designated signatures will be retained by the Head of Housing Management.

Void Management Policy

Section 1: Introduction

Void management covers the range of activities concerning tenancy changes in social housing, in particular the management of empty housing.

Effective void management requires close working relations between housing management and maintenance sections.

Void Management is important for two main reasons, namely to:

- let empty housing quickly to maximise rental income and
- ensure that sustainable communities are maintained.

This policy meets the Scottish Housing Regulator's good practice standard for the effective management of empty houses that requires us to:

"We monitor demand for our houses and maximise the use of available housing, keeping empty properties and spaces in our shared accommodation to a minimum. We make sure our properties are of an appropriate lettable standard"

(AS15: Void Management, Performance Standards for social landlords and homelessness functions COSLA/Communities Scotland/Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, 2006)

In implementing this policy, we aim to ensure that void management practices promote our equality commitments and are not discriminatory.

Finally, we acknowledge that voids may constitute a potential risk to the association as it involves risk of lost rental income.

We deem this risk to be medium owing to the fact that:

- we operate comprehensive and inter-dependent policies that serve to allocate empty houses quickly (See Section 5);
- our housing stock is generally popular and in demand; and

Section 2: Policy aims and objectives

Our policy aims and objectives set the framework of actions that we take to implement the policy effectively. Our key aims in void management are to:

- meet relevant legal and good practice standards, including our commitments to promoting equal opportunities;
- make best use of the housing stock through allocating empty houses as quickly as possible, thus minimising rent loss;
- set time scales for repairs, throughout the void process, to ensure that houses are let to specified time scales;
- allocate houses to standards specified in law and to our re-let standard (Appendix 2);

- promote sustainable communities through addressing difficult-to-let housing;
- assess voids data on an ongoing basis, through, our performance management system, to inform future policy and practice;
- review this policy in consultation with service users.

Section 3: Legal Issues and good practice

Void management is not covered as a separate issue in law but is dealt with through allocation law and repair law.

3.1. Allocation Issues

This is contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and is explained in detail in our allocation policy. This Act specifies groups to whom we should give reasonable preference when letting houses; we address these housing needs in our policy.

3.2. Repair Issues

We repair our houses in line with legal duties contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

These duties require us to ensure that, at the beginning of tenancy, houses must be wind and watertight and in all other respects reasonably fit for human habitation.

In line with good practice guidance, we have established a letting standard that goes beyond legal duties. (Appendix 2)

3.3. Good practice issues

In order to meet general good practice guidance, we:

- establish comprehensive monitoring systems to evaluate the nature of voids;
- address unpopular housing through specific lettings initiatives that are likely to involve partnership working; and
- ensure that void policy does not simply address “bricks and mortar issues” but takes account of social and environmental needs of service users.

Section 4: Voids explained

Void properties are not by themselves always problematic. For example, having some empty property is essential to enable transfers to take place, or to allow repair and developmental work to proceed.

What is inappropriate, though, is having houses that could be let lying empty without good reason.

Our monitoring system categorises voids under a range of headings so that Board Members can identify the nature of particular voids.

In particular, this enables them to identify the policy issues to be addressed.

We categorise voids under the following headings:

- 1 Voids that are repaired and available for let
- 2 Voids under repair (separate into minor or major etc)
- 3 Voids awaiting improvement or modernisation works
- 4 Voids awaiting adaptations for disabled people
- 5 Voids flowing from development programmes (through development projects)
- 6 Voids awaiting demolition
- 7 Voids subject to future decision, for example, kept empty as unpopular and sustainability issues are being considered.

Section 5: Other policies

In order to implement the void policy effectively, we recognise that it is linked closely to a range of other important policies. This section outlines briefly how these links operate.

Allocation Policy

We incorporate void management issues into allocation practice by reviewing the housing list on a regular basis.

This serves to reduce numbers of wasted offers as we know that applicants are still interested in receiving offers of housing.

We carry out accompanied viewings, if possible, to ensure that housing applicants receive comprehensive information about houses available for let.

We evaluate the reasons for refusals of offers of houses and the reasons for termination of tenancies; this enables us to monitor potential problems that may be developing in specific areas and to take appropriate remedial actions to prevent areas from becoming unpopular.

Development policy

We use quality development specifications to minimise potential void problems at a later stage. Thus, we include service users in design specifications that address a wide range of needs and preferences, including the accessibility needs of disabled people.

Estate Management policy

We adopt a holistic approach to estate management that considers, not simply housing matters, but also environmental and socio-economic concerns. This is done in order to promote sustainable communities by making our housing areas places in which people want to live and work.

Repair Policy

We complete all repairs required before the house is let and ensure that it meets our re-let standard. Meeting such standards is critical in meeting tenant satisfaction and thus promoting sustainable tenancies that may result in reduced void levels.

Section 6: Unpopular Housing

6.1. Unpopular housing what we mean

We identify housing that is unpopular through a number of methods, including:

- a small or non-existent housing list;
- properties that are frequently refused;
- high rates of voids available for letting; and
- properties with high turnover rates.

Note

These are guidelines only and each case is assessed on merit. For example, there may be no demand for housing due to other considerations such as lack of employment prospects. This does not mean that the actual house is unpopular.

Our staff procedures explain how we address unpopular housing.

Section 7: Staff development

We provide ourselves on having a professional staff team and provide ongoing training to ensure that services are maintained to the highest possible standard.

Additional training issues are identified for individuals through the personal development review that is undertaken on an annual basis with all staff.

Training that we provide covers the following issues:

- legal and good practice training, including the importance of monitoring;
- policy and procedures training;
- specialist training, as required, for example, how to market unpopular housing effectively.

Board member training is also carried out and on an ongoing basis includes key issues such as policy development and how to monitor policy implementation effectively.

Section 8: Policy review

We consult with tenants and other service users in the development of the void policy.

This is done through our Tenant Participation strategy.

When reviewing the policy, we take into account:

- changes to law and good practice guidance; and
- effects of the current policy in reducing voids.

We provide tenants and service users with information on how the policy is operating through:

- The provision of performance information
- Assessing customer feedback using satisfaction surveys
- Providing general information via newsletters and forum meetings.

Section 9: Addressing complaints

The Association addresses complaints through its established procedure.

Staff procedures – Void Management

1.1 Introduction

These procedures derive from our void management policy. This policy sets rules to ensure that all properties that become vacant are repaired to our specified standards and within set time scales.

Void procedures are implemented from the point of tenancy termination; this is good practice to minimise delays to the re-letting of houses.

Present contractual arrangements expect the contractor to undertake all necessary works, including utilities safety checks.

We will monitor all aspects of the void management process, including the performance of the contractor.

Each void will be jointly inspected by the contractor and the Association, on completion of the repairs, to ensure a consistent and quality service.

We also provide regular reports to the Board on void management activities; details of this are contained in the void management policy.

Housing staff should carry out their duties in line with the following procedures.

Staff are also referred to as “you” throughout the procedures.

1.2 Our procedures

Our staff procedures cover the following matters:

- aim of procedure;
- staff actions during the termination of tenancy notice period;
- actions following return of keys;
- monitoring; and
- dealing with unpopular housing.

1.2.1 Aim of procedure

The aim of this procedure is to set out clearly the steps that individual staff should take to ensure that the void management policy is implemented effectively.

It is essential to have procedures so that we carry out our duties consistently, accountably and fairly and meet the objectives of our policy.

This also ensures that our services attain the quality standards that we desire.

Each section specifies the action to be taken and the timescales for completion.

1.2.2. Staff actions during the termination of tenancy notice period

Following receipt of notice of termination of tenancy from the outgoing tenant the Lettings Officer will take the following action.

(a) Updating the IBS system

You should update the IBS system to terminate the tenancy, including all necessary dates in the void management screen together with the reasons for termination.

Time scale

To be completed on receipt of termination notice from the outgoing tenant

(b) Issuing confirmation letter to tenant

You should issue the confirmation letter to the outgoing tenant advising of termination date, the status of the rent account and date for return of keys.

If tenants owe rent arrears, they will be informed of their responsibility to clear such arrears. Repayment arrangements will be agreed and will take account of tenant's ability to pay.

This letter should also seek information concerning house improvements to ascertain if the tenant intends to claim compensation. (This needs to be added to the letter too)

At this point, the outgoing tenant will also be advised that they will receive an allowance of £50 (fifty pounds) payable at the end of tenancy provided that the following conditions are met at the void inspection.

The house should be:

- cleared of all rubbish, internally and externally;
- in a reasonably clean and tidy condition;
- free of damage other than that due to fair wear and tear;
- cleared floor coverings as agreed at the pre-termination inspection.

You should also check that any agreement to remove old huts, and so on, has been fulfilled.

Time scale

To be issued on receipt of termination notice from the outgoing tenant.

(c) Pre-termination property inspection

The Lettings Officer should carry out a pre-termination inspection of the property within **three working days** of the termination notification.

Any technical matter, which arises as a result of the pre-termination, should be raised with the Clerk of Works through issuing of an inspection order.

The Clerk of Works will then carry out an inspection within **three working days**.

If major work is identified, for example, kitchen or bathroom replacements, an assessment will be made at this point to determine when the work will be carried out.

- during the void repair period - essential work to achieve re-let standard; or

- post re-let in consultation with the prospective tenant. Note that any works required to meet statutory requirements will be undertaken prior to the new tenant being signed up to tenancy.

If other repair work is considered as essential, the Clerk of works should instruct orders before the property becomes void.

This will reduce order time and any potential delays during the void repair period.

The Clerk of Works should also update the Lettings Officer of this.

Any non-standard, or tenant installations, should be identified at this point of the process.

Following completion of the pre-termination inspection, the outgoing tenant will be advised by the Lettings Officer of any remedial works, which are required.

The tenant will be requested to sign the inspection form acknowledging that they agree.

A follow up letter and second inspection **by the Lettings Officer** will be undertaken to ensure that the works are carried out.

Failure to complete such work may result in rechargeable repairs being instructed. This means that we will do the work and charge the tenant accordingly. The Lettings Officer is responsible for the monitoring of the notice period to ensure that keys are returned on time by the outgoing tenant and ensuring that key returns are pursued where necessary.

Should adjustment to the rental charge be necessary due to late receipt of keys, this will also be arranged by the Lettings Officer.

Time scale

To carry out the second inspection at least one week before the end of tenancy.

1.2.3 Actions following return of keys

Several actions or processes require to be completed once the tenant returns their keys.

These cover:

- key receipting;
- void property inspection;
- decorative standard;
- early lets;
- gas checks;
- administrative records;
- draining down of water supply in void houses;

- completing void works;
- returning of keys by the contractor.

(a) Key receipting

A monitoring sheet for the control of keys will be placed in the key book which is kept at reception. This should be done by the Lettings Officer immediately following the receipt of keys.

(b) Void property inspection

Following receipt of keys, the void property will be inspected by the Association's Clerk of Works.

The repair work that is recorded on the void property works order form must meet our re-let standard. The works must also be completed in line with the targets contained within our void property specification. This is highlighted in Table 1 below.

The Lettings Officer will be advised by the inspecting officer if the outgoing tenant qualifies for the fifty pound termination payment.

If so, the Finance section will be requested to raise the payment and forward it to the appropriate address.

Time scale

To complete the inspection within **two working days** of receiving the keys

(c) Decorative Standard

The inspection should also include an assessment of the decorative standard of the property and, if necessary, the Clerk of Works will order the required work to meet the expected standard.

In the absence of the Clerk of Works, the Head of Operations or the Head of Housing Management will undertake the void inspection.

All voids fall into one of three decorative standards:

- property left in good condition with no decoration required;
- basic decoration required in two or three rooms;
- significant re-decoration is required, that is, if decoration is required in more than three rooms.

If the property requires decoration of up to three rooms, (insert the jobholder who does this) should offer the prospective – or incoming tenant – the standard decoration allowance. This is highlighted in the Table below followed by the procedural steps that we apply.

If the property requires decoration of more than three rooms, (insert the jobholder who does this) should complete the re-decoration specification. In such cases, no decoration payment is paid to tenants.

Note

If a house has been identified as difficult to let, further incentive payments can be considered for prospective tenants at the discretion of the Head of Housing Management in accordance with the difficult to let policy.

(d) Early lets

If houses have been identified as being potentially suitable for quick re-let by the Lettings Officer at the pre-termination inspection, the Clerk of Works should, where possible, support this assessment by encouraging early completion by the contractor.

The completed void inspection form should be passed to the Repairs Administrator who will then issue a void works order to the contractor.

Time scale

To issue void works orders to contractors no later than 2.00pm on the day following inspection.

(e) Gas checks

The repairs Administrator should issue a further works order to the Gas Service Contractor to undertake a gas safety check on the property. This is done at the same time as the void works order is issued.

(f) Administrative records

The Repairs Administrator should update the IBS void management details to record the actual order date of void works.

Any rechargeable repairs should be highlighted within the form and the Repairs Administrator will add appropriate costing and forward the information to the Finance Section.

The latter will then issue the necessary account to the Former Tenant. (See Rechargeable Repairs Procedure within Repairs & Maintenance manual).

(g) Draining down of water supply in void houses

Between 1st October and 30th April each year, all void houses will have their water supply system, including heating, drained to protect the property and surrounding residents from water damage due to burst pipes/tanks.

The instruction to the contractor will be given as part of the void work order.

At the beginning of October, the Lettings Officer will pass a list of standing voids to the Head of Operations who will arrange to have the properties drained down in accordance with the above procedure.

Discretion should be used in draining down properties at other times of the year where for example, periods of inclement weather are forecast, or the property may be at risk from vandalism.

You may seek further guidance on this issue from the Director, Head of Housing Management or the Head of Operations.

As draining down is not discretionary, any decision not to drain houses down during the above period can only be made by the Director, Head of Housing Management or the Head of Operations.

Time scale

The mandatory period for draining down is 1 October until 30 April.

(h) Completing void works

The void works will be completed by the contractor according to the agreed specification.

The normal time scale for the completion of works is **seven working days**.

No extension to the void work period will be granted, unless exceptional circumstances arise as void repair time is a key measure when reviewing contractor performance.

A report on extensions granted to the contractor will be provided to the Board on a quarterly basis.

During this period, the main contractor is expected to ensure that all necessary works are undertaken to meet the Void standard specification, including any minor decorative works that have been specified.

Where minor decorative work is specified, the void works period is **ten working days**.

In exceptions where whole house re-decoration is required, a timescale will be agreed in advance with the contractor; this must not exceed twelve **working days**.

This allows maintenance work to be practically complete before re-decoration commences.

The Clerk of Works is responsible for monitoring the void work process in conjunction with the contractor.

Should the contractor discover a situation that requires additional or specialist work, the Clerk of Works will assess the situation and provide recommendations as to the way in which the matter should be taken forward.

Whenever such situations arise, it is the responsibility of the Clerk of Works to advise the Repairs Administrator and Lettings Officer of likely delays.

This is done to allow prospective tenants to be kept informed of progress, as well as instructing repair order variations.

(i) Returning of keys by the contractor

On completion of works, a joint handover inspection will be carried out by the contractor and Clerk of Works or, in the CoW's absence, the Operations Manager or Head of Housing Management.

The property will be inspected with reference to the original void work order.

This process is designed to ensure consistency of approach and quality.

Where the repairs are completed to meet our standard, the void works form will be signed off by one of the staff members identified above, with a copy being retained by both parties.

Any additional works highlighted at this point will be subject to a new order at re-let.

The Clerk of Works should advise the Lettings Officer of any such additional work to ensure accurate information exchange with the incoming tenant at point of re-let and instruct the Repairs Administrator to issue the work order.

A copy of any such additional works orders will also be passed to the Head of Housing Management who will collate the information and provide a report to the Board within the normal reporting cycle.

On completion, the Clerk of Works will advise the Lettings Officer by e-mail that the property is ready for re-let.

The Lettings officer will arrange for the new tenant to sign the tenancy agreement at the earliest possible point following such notification.

Safety certificates for gas and electricity supplies will be collated by the Repairs Administrator who will pass appropriate copies to the Lettings Officer for inclusion in the new tenant sign-up pack.

Time scale

To complete the post inspection on the last day of the void work period.

1.2.4 Monitoring

The Lettings Officer should monitor the progress of voids using the IBS System, which should also be updated with the appropriate information with full use being made of the void control screens within the system.

Information extracted from the IBS system forms the basis of the monthly management reports that monitor all aspects of the void process.

These reports will, in turn, be used to advise the Board of trends and issues that require scrutiny. Such reports will form part of the reporting cycle agreed by the Board.

The Clerk of Works is responsible for monitoring works related issues concerning voids through the void works forms.

All issues relating to the works contract will initially be dealt with by the Head of Operations who will report any matters that arise to the Director.

Post Completion Quality Audits

As well as the general reporting package, we will provide for an inspection of up to **twenty per cent** of all voids for purposes of quality and staff support.

Findings of this internal audit trail are reported to the Board on a **six monthly basis**.

This approach complies with regulatory standards to ensure that audit checks are incorporated into the void management process.

1.2.5. Dealing with difficult to let housing

The following procedures should automatically be considered when voids are identified as being unpopular and difficult to let.

Advertisement

The particular void should be advertised on the public notice boards within the Association's offices and, if possible, arrangements should be made to place notices in East Ayrshire Council's offices.

Consideration should also be given to advertising individual properties by address in the local press.

Authority for this action must be given by the Director on recommendation from Head of Housing Management.

Notification of unpopular voids that are difficult to let

A vacancy circular may be distributed to all applicants on the housing list inviting expressions of interest. This is not necessary if applicants have already declined the void houses in question.

A vacancy list - similar to the one above - should be prepared by the Lettings Officer and circulated to Housing Officers who may be able to generate interest when visiting tenants and other service users.

This list should also be given to appropriate sections within the Council.

Information relating to such houses is also placed on the Association's web site.

Individual houses that are unpopular or difficult to let

Individual houses that remain empty after **six weeks** will be withdrawn from the standard lettings process.

Such properties are advertised on our website, the local press and, if appropriate, through local estate agencies.

We can allocate such a house to any applicant wanting to accept the property.

You must seek the prior approval of the Head of Housing Management or Director before letting houses under this approach.

It is stressed that there must be no obvious physical reason why the property could not otherwise be let using the standard policy. For example, refusals of property is due to issues that can be easily remedied such as unkempt gardens, decoration and so on.

Incentives

If incentives assist in enabling specific houses that are unpopular to be let, the Lettings Officer may request permission to do so from the Director or the Head of Housing Management. Incentives may include:

- **enhanced property works such as, renewal of internal joinery;**
- **provision of white goods such as cooker, washing machine; or**
- **rent free periods at the commencement of tenancy.**

The cost limit for any one tenancy will be £500 (five hundred pounds) irrespective of the package adopted. Such payments are reported to the Board as part of the monitoring framework.

Adaptations

Solid fuel and electric systems heat a small number of houses owned by the Association. Such systems are now in low demand and, therefore, may make such properties difficult to let.

We convert houses with solid fuel heating to gas fired central heating as soon as they become empty.

Staff And Service Delivery

The Association will ensure that staff have the relevant expertise and where necessary will provide training to help staff carry out their duties effectively.

Staff will receive specific training on issues such as the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended) and the relevant Performance Standards that should be applied with regard to the module.

Availability Of Module

As with all of the Associations policies, this document can be made available to anyone who requests it, in full and in part, on tape, in large print, in Braille, and in translation into another language at no cost to the individual.

Conclusion

This module will be reviewed and amended bi-annually as per the Board. The module will be reviewed particularly in the light of legislative changes, new policy/procedures guidance, the performance of Shire Housing Association and the views of customers. Should any legislative or customer issues arise with regard to any section of the module, the section can be taken to the Board for review prior to the annual review of the module.

The targets relating to the content of this module will be reviewed and amended as necessary on an annual basis for inclusion in the Internal Management Plan.

Performance Standards

The undernoted Performance Standards are relevant to the content of this module and have been considered in the development of the Manual and the application of the procedures which deliver the policies.

Performance Standard: GS1.2 Policies and Procedures

Description: We have high-quality written policies and procedures to guide our actions.

Activity: Management Systems

Performance Standard: GS2.1 Equal Opportunities

Description: We embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work.

Activity: Social Inclusion

Performance Standard: AS1.1 Access to Housing
Description: We ensure that people have fair and open access to our housing list and assessment process. We work with others to maximise and simplify access routes into our housing.
Activity: Housing Management

Performance Standard: AS1.2 Lettings
Description: We let houses in a way that gives reasonable preference to those in greatest housing need; makes best use of available stock; maximises choice; and helps to sustain communities.
Activity: Housing Management

Performance Standard: AS1.3 Tenancies
Description: We offer the most secure form of tenancy compatible with the purpose of the housing. The agreement makes clear the rights and duties of the tenant and landlord. We act to uphold these rights and duties in a fair and responsible manner.
Activity: Housing Management

Performance Standard: AS1.5 Void Management
Description: We monitor demand for our houses and maximise the use of available housing, keeping empty properties and spaces in our shared accommodation to a minimum. We make sure our properties are of an appropriate lettable standard.
Activity: Housing Management

Appendices List

Appendix 1

The Board, Staff, And Tenant Responsibilities

Staff and the Board responsibilities are clearly defined as follows:

Board Responsibility

- ◆ Determining, reviewing and altering policy as required
- ◆ Monitoring the outcomes that arise from the operation of the voids and allocations module.
- ◆ Ensuring compliance with the Equality and Diversity policy.
- ◆ Adherence to Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- ◆ Final evaluation of any complains concerning the operation of the module via Complaints Policy

Staff Responsibility

- ◆ Implementing the voids and allocations policies
- ◆ Developing and implementing procedures, to include responsibilities, delegated authority, and reporting procedures
- ◆ Providing monitoring reports for the Board
- ◆ Preparing an annual performance and outcomes report for the Board
- ◆ Managing the allowances budget
- ◆ Adherence to Financial Regulations
- ◆ Adherence to Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

Tenant Responsibility

- ◆ Tenant Responsibilities are clearly defined within the SST and the Tenants Information Pack.

Appendix 2

Insert current void specification.