



# Voids Management Policy 2020-23

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## POLICY PURPOSE

This document outlines Derby Homes' policy for management of our empty homes (voids) and supports both the City Council's Housing Strategy, focussing on making the best use of existing stock, and our mission of 'High Quality Services for People, Homes and Communities. This document also takes into account our statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

## Document Control

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The management of voids is one of Derby Homes key service areas. Void repairs must be clearly defined and adhere to our Lettable Standard, progress documented and performance reviewed to ensure our obligations are being met. The service must minimise void loss and thus financial loss and aim to maximise customer satisfaction.

## **2. AIMS**

- 2.1 Derby Homes aims to deliver a high quality voids management service that both meets the needs and expectations of customers (internal and external) and represents value for money. We look to achieve these aims through a comprehensive suite of procedures and monitoring mechanisms.
- 2.2 This policy sets out the core principles to be adopted by Derby Homes to achieve the following outcomes:
- Comply with legal duties and regulatory requirements
  - Customers in housing need can be housed with the minimum of delay
  - Reduce the time taken to re-let homes and maximise rental income
  - Ensure customers are allocated homes that meet our Lettable Standard and maximises customer satisfaction
  - Ensure outgoing customers are aware of their responsibilities prior to termination, to minimise void costs and rechargeable repairs
  - Contribute to the development of sustainable, thriving communities by reducing the impact of empty homes on the community.

## **3. SCOPE**

- 3.1 This policy relates to all empty rented homes that are awaiting letting, including both active and passive voids. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:
- Voids Management Procedure
  - Tenancy Termination Procedure
  - Home Release Policy
  - Rechargeable Repairs Policy
  - Responsive Repairs Policy
  - Voids Lettable Standard
  - Asbestos Management Policy
  - Delivery of Capital Investment Programmes
  - Electrical Safety Policy
  - Fire Safety Management Policy
  - Allocations Policy
  - Escorted Viewing Procedure
  - Lone Working Policy
  - Finished Tenancy Policy

#### **4. LEGISLATION AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

- 4.1 Derby Homes carries out repairs in line with legal and statutory obligations, to safeguard the health, safety and security of customers, other occupants or visitors and to safeguard the building and environment.

#### **5. HEALTH & SAFETY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

- 5.1 Derby Homes carries out repairs in line with legal and statutory obligations, to safeguard the health, safety and security of customers, other occupants or visitors and to safeguard the building and environment. These obligations are outlined in our Responsive Repairs Policy and Lettable Standard which includes gas, electric, asbestos, water, lifting equipment and fire prevention compliance management.
- 5.2 Derby Homes ensures that it meets the Construction, Design and Management Regulations (CDM) 2015 in the management of voids relating to repairs undertaken by Derby Homes employees, appointed contractors and their subcontractors.
- 5.3 Derby Homes classifies void properties as 'closed sites' until categorised as 'Safe to View' and will ensure that all inspections and work undertaken at properties is carried out in accordance with Health & Safety guidance and regulation.
- 5.4 Derby Homes will ensure that staff will work in accordance with the Lone Working Policy when inspecting properties, carrying out accompanied viewings or applicant assessments as necessary.

#### **6. DEFINITION**

- 6.1 A property is void when the tenancy has been ended and the property is unoccupied. The keys are available, either by return from the customer or agreed change of locks with the relevant allocations team. During this period no rental income is received.

#### **7. PRINCIPLES**

- 7.1 Teams within Derby Homes will work together in an open co-ordinated way to ensure effective voids management, with a strong focus on compliance and customer service.
- 7.2 The Voids Manager and Social Housing Options Manager are responsible for the key to key management of the process, from notice through to sign up, with the Voids Manager having specific responsibility for the completion of timely void repairs work.
- 7.3 The Voids Manager is responsible for managing the performance of void repairs and meeting the lettable standard.
- 7.4 Detailed procedures and systems are in place and underpin the delivery of this Policy and the steps to be taken to ensure the outcomes in 1.1 are achieved.

- 7.5 Derby Homes has a Lettable Standard in place supported by procedures which set out how we administer the management of voids awaiting letting.
- 7.6 All elements relating to safety compliance are contained within the relevant policies. These include Fire, Gas, Electrical, Asbestos, Water and Lifting Equipment.
- 7.7 Derby Homes ensures a valid Energy Performance Certificate is available and issued to the customer and a valid gas safety certificate (where appropriate).

## **8. CUSTOMERS**

- 8.1 Customer responsibility and obligations for maintaining their home in line with the tenancy conditions is made clear within the terms of the tenancy agreement. Expectations are set out as part of the Tenancy sign up and post let visit.
- 8.2 Derby Homes recognises the cost to the customer and the organisation arising from tenancy failure. As part of the allocation process a sustainability assessment is carried out to minimise the risk of tenancy failure and subsequent void costs.
- 8.3 The sign up process for new customers includes a “sign up checklist” which confirms the condition of the property at the start of the tenancy and is signed and agreed by both customer and staff. The condition of the property is again reviewed with customers at the post-let visit, usually conducted within 4 weeks of customers moving into their new home.
- 8.4 We aim to carry out pre-termination inspections, to clarify and confirm with the customer their responsibilities regarding the ending of their tenancy and to inform the management of void works.
- 8.5 Gas and Electric supplies are transferred to our partner providers. This ensures utility supplies to allow compliance checks and a better customer experience with regard to the taking on of utilities and clearance of any debts left by previous customers.
- 8.6 The Lettable standard is clear on Landlord / customer responsibility and will be reviewed and agreed with customers, and clearly publicised.
- 8.7 We will seek the views of customers on the standard to which empty homes have been let to them through customer feedback and will seek insight of the customer experience through service review groups and other customer involved activities, including surveys.
- 8.8 These results will influence improvements to the service offered where these have been identified and are achievable.
- 8.9 We will give consideration to the issue of security of empty homes and to the community and environmental impact of options such as security screening.

## **9. ADAPPTIONS TO PROPERTIES**

- 9.1 Where a property has had major adaptations, these adaptations will remain and the allocations process will be used to identify a customer who has relevant needs. Major adaptations will only be removed where they are having a significant and detrimental impact on the letting of the property.

## **10. DAMAGE AND DISPOSAL OF GOODS**

- 10.1 Where damage has been caused to the property by the outgoing tenant, or is due to lack of due care and attention, consideration will be given to recovery of these costs in accordance with our policy on rechargeable repairs.
- 10.2 Where goods are left in a property at the end of a tenancy we will either dispose of, or store the items and recharge in line with our policy on rechargeable repairs or will gift to the incoming tenant where suitable and in line with procedure. White goods, including cookers, will be removed to ensure safety unless they form part of a furnished tenancy pack.

## **11. APPRAISAL OF VOIDS**

- 11.1 Where a property is scheduled for planned maintenance works, consideration will be given to bringing these forward, where it is practical and feasible, to enable these to be completed whilst the property is empty to minimise the impact of such works on future customers.

## **12. PRIVACY STATEMENT**

- 12.1 Derby Homes collect information ('personal data') so that we can manage and support our relationship with our customers, staff, contractors and 3rd parties to comply with legal obligations, improve our services and achieve our legitimate business aims. We are committed to complying with data protection legislation when handling personal data. Everyone has rights around their data, including the right to access their data, and to object to the way it is processed. For more information on how and why we process customers' data, and how customers can exercise their rights, please see our full Privacy Policy on our website.

## **13. MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

- 13.1 Compliance with this policy will be monitored by the Head of Housing Options and Head of Repairs.
- 13.2 Void performance is monitored by the Head of Repairs and Head of Planned Maintenance across all categories (minor, major and specialist) with each having their own target completion time. In addition the Head of Housing Options monitors re-let times and void loss and these KPI's are reported quarterly to SMT.
- 13.3 The effectiveness of the policy and associated procedures will be monitored by key performance indicators, reported to SMT quarterly.

## **14. REVIEW**

- 14.1 We will carry out a fundamental review of this policy every three years or sooner subject to legal, regulatory changes or if internal changes require.