

Voids and Re-Lets Policy

Cornwall Housing (CHL)

Treven Kernow

Date: October 2018

Version 4.4



Policy control sheet

Current Document Status

Status	Live
Reference	V001/CJP
Last reviewed	October 2018
Document type	Policy
Document Location	CHL Intranet
Area Applicable	Business

Version History

Version	Version created	Date approved	Date for review	Author/s	Approved by	Revised by
4.3	13/03/2012	28/05/2012	31/03/15	M Gallagher S Nott	CH Board	T Tregenza + others
4.4	18/12/17		31/03/18	CJ Pickles	Nick Cross	
4.4	10/2019	10/2019	10/2021	C Franks	Nick Cross	C Franks

Equality impact assessment record

Date	Type of assessment conducted	Stage/level completed	Summary of actions/decisions	Completed by	Impact assessment review date
01/04/2010	Full	Complete	See EIA	V Brooke	Jul 2012

Policy guidance and advice contact details

Directorate	Service Area	Name of policy developer	Contact number	Email address
Resources	Business Improvement	C Pickles	01872323751	chris.pickles@cornwallhousing.org

Notes:

Legal influences on this policy:

Housing and Planning Act, 2004, 2016
The Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations, 1994
Defective Premises Act, 1972
Housing Health and Safety Rating System: Guidance for Landlords and Property Related Professionals, 2006
Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017
Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act, 1993
Building (Amendment) Regulations, 2016
Equality Act, 2010
Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH), 2002
HSG151: Protecting the Public
CC/CHL Tenancy Agreements

Non-legal influences on this policy:

Voids and Re-Let Policy, v4.3

Other documents linked to this policy:

Tenant Handbook
Cornish Housing Standard, v4.2

Table of contents

	Page
1. Summary	1
2. Background	1
3. Objectives	1
4. Scope	1
5. Policy details	2
6. Policy management	5
7. Breaches and non-compliance	6
8. Measurement	6
9. Evaluation and review	7

Appendices:

Ref Number	Title	Remarks
A	Technical specification – HRA re-let	
B	Technical specification – PSL re-Let	
C	CHL Lettable standard – customer page-View	Summary of key policy headlines
D	Void definition – major/standard	Guidance for defining a major works void
E	Torts (Interference with Goods) Act, 1977 - process	E.1 – Process map E.2 – Tort notice template E.3 – Itemised list template
F	Property viewing – staff guidance	Staff instruction notes

1. Summary

- 1.0 A void can be described as an empty, untenanted property owned or managed by CHL.
- 1.1 The Voids and Re-Lets Policy sets out the void service and associated activity in order to deliver the best possible service for current and future customers.
- 1.2 It highlights the following aspects in depth:
- The void repair standard
 - Expectations of outgoing tenants
 - Expectations of new customers (including property viewing)
- 1.3 Aimed at both tenants and Cornwall Housing (CHL) staff, it is the sole reference for all activities associated with a void property.
- 1.4 The policy's aim is to ensure the void process, is as easy and convenient to customers and staff, as is reasonably possible.
- 1.5 A summary of key policy headlines can be found at Appendix C.

2. Background

- 2.0 It is essential that both customers and staff are fully aware of the service they can expect to receive, and deliver, during the void process.
- 2.1 Delivering clear, accurate information mitigates the frictions and stress that can be faced when moving home.

3. Objectives

- 3.0 The objectives of this policy are to:
- Provide clarity to all service users
 - Minimise the length of time a property remains void
 - Provide value for money
 - Ensure all void properties are let to an agreed standard
 - Be accountable and fair

4. Scope

- 4.0 The policy will cover all aspects of the void 'journey' – from the end of the established tenancy, to the start of a new tenancy.

- 4.1 It focuses on repair standards and critical health and safety measures (Appendices A and B).
- 4.2 Throughout it will ensure that all activities are representative of best practice, adhere to legislative requirements and free of discrimination.

5. Policy details

5.0 Terminating an existing tenancy

- 5.0.1 All tenancy terminations must be received in writing or via the online service to be accepted by CHL.
- 5.0.2 Notice will be taken from the Monday following receipt of a notice to terminate an existing tenancy. The official tenancy end date (TED) will be set 28 calendar days following.
- 5.0.3 In certain situations, such as death, eviction, nursing/residential home provision - CHL may exercise its discretion to reduce or extend the notice period.
- 5.0.4 Keys may be returned to the business in advance of the tenancy end date, but this will not reduce the notice period and the outgoing tenant will still be liable for:
- All rental payments
 - Utilities
 - Council Tax
- 5.0.5 If keys are not returned by the TED, CHL will extend the notice period by 7 calendar days. The tenant will remain responsible for all liabilities as listed above.
- 5.0.6 CHL will expect the property to be of a condition as per the tenancy agreement. Expectations are:
- Clean and tidied, with the property free of all rubbish
 - Walls to be clean, free of significant marks.
 - All surfaces to be washed with sugar soap (if a smoker is resident)
 - Any garden areas to be clean, free of rubbish with grass, bushes and trees maintained
 - Damage to property i.e. holes in walls/doors put right
- 5.0.7 Failure to meet these expectations will result in a recharge against the outgoing tenant.

5.0.8 CHL reserves the right to conduct inspections of the property and conduct repair work during the notice period.

5.1 Terminations due to death

5.1.1 CHL will ensure on completion of the termination period - the tenancy has ceased on our rent account system, and sensitive arrangements are made with the designated party to return the property quickly and with limited stress.

5.1.2 Any identified recharges will be raised against the estate of the deceased – this decision will be made by senior CHL managers.

5.2 Choosing and viewing a property (applicants)

5.2.1 All applicants (except those in immediate homeless need) will receive the provisional offer of a property following successful bidding on the online Cornwall Homechoice service.

5.2.2 It is **strongly encouraged** that before any bid is placed the applicant visits the area to establish it is suitable for their need.

5.2.3 An accompanied viewing of the property can take place with the following restrictions:

- No pets will be allowed
- A maximum of four persons per viewing
- Due to the potential hazards in the property, viewing with children is **discouraged**. Any children under 18 must remain with an adult at all times
- Appropriate clothing should be worn – enclosed shoes, long trousers as minimum

5.2.4 Staff responsibilities and a risk assessment can be found at Appendix F.

5.2.5 Provisional offers of a tenancy will include:

- The address and description of the property
- Rent and service charges (if applicable)

5.2.6 An applicant must respond to the offer, either accepting or refusing the property within three working days.

5.2.7 If an applicant is refused or refuses the property, reasons will be recorded. The applicant will be made aware this may affect future applications.

5.3 Offer of a property – emergency/homeless applicant

5.3 If accommodation is offered under Cornwall Council's homelessness duty the applicant can accept and request a review of its suitability after they move in. Refusal may lead to a discharge of statutory duty.

5.4 Standards for re-letting empty properties

5.4.1 Full technical details for property re-let standards can be found at Appendices A & B. A property will be:

- **Suitable for habitation** – no structural issues, free from damp, adequate service provision (water, lighting, sewerage)
- **Secure** – all access points will be lockable or have the ability to be secured.
- **Safe** – the property will meet safety and compliance standards required to re-let a property, with identified hazards removed or made safe. Smoke alarms will be fitted and tested.
- **Clean** – the property will be free from litter, debris, excessive dust and dirt.
- **Decorative** – the property will be in reasonable decorative condition, or capable of being decorated by the incoming tenant.
- **Fuel poverty** – the property will have adequate thermal insulation.
- **Emergency/temporary accommodation** – will have additional works conducted as defined by individual lease agreements.

5.4.2 **There will be no outstanding repairs for which CHL is responsible for by reason of law.**

5.5 Abandoned and illegally occupied properties

5.5.1 CHL will seek the prompt repossession of any illegally occupied properties.

5.5.2 Where it is suspected a property is abandoned, all reasonable efforts will be taken to establish the whereabouts of the tenant before repossession occurs.

5.5.3 CHL will follow the Torts (Interference with Goods) Act, 1977 in the management of belongings found within properties. See Appendix E for detail.

5.6 Customer engagement

5.6.1 It is CHL policy to remove fixtures and fittings installed by previous tenants including sheds, built-in wardrobes, curtain rails etc

5.6.2 If time permits in the letting cycle, these items will be offered to the incoming customer. Should they wish to retain the items they will be required to sign a disclaimer.

5.7 Redecoration

5.7.1 CHL will not automatically redecorate **any CHL managed** property. Redecoration will be by exception – the requirement assessed against the standard, and the applicant's physical ability (and support network).

5.7.2 External decoration is part of a planned maintenance programme.

5.7.3 Decoration vouchers may be issued to assist new customers with the cost of redecoration. This is **not automatic** and will depend on the decorative need of the property.

5.7.4 CHL staff guidance can be found at Appendices A & B.

5.8 Carpets (and other floor coverings)

5.8.1 CHL will only allow previous tenants to leave behind carpets and floor coverings as long as they are:

- absent of significant marks, damage and stains
- absent of unpleasant smells or signs of damp
- assessed visually as free of fleas, mites etc

5.8.2 Where the coverings do not meet this standard they will be disposed of by the outgoing tenant.

5.8.3 The incoming tenant will be given the option to keep the floor coverings at sign up. If they choose to do so, they will be asked to sign a waiver accepting responsibility.

5.8.4 If the incoming tenant refuses the floor coverings they will be removed by CHL within 28 calendar days.

5.9 External areas (gardens – outside spaces)

5.9.1 Trees will only be maintained if they pose an immediate risk to health and safety or threaten the property.

5.9.2 Fencing will only be replaced if it is required to define a boundary line, or there is a sudden drop of 300mm or more, and assessed as a hazard.

6 Policy management

6.1 This policy will be reviewed annually by service directors for suitability.

6.2 Table 1 below defines staff policy responsibilities:

Stakeholder	Responsible	Accountable	Contributor	Informed
	Customer Interaction & Policy Management			
	Para's: 5.1 – 5.3, 5.5, 5.6			
DLT			✓	✓
Director Landlord Services	✓	✓		
Director Housing Options		✓		✓
Operational Business Manager			✓	✓
Customer			✓	✓
	Void Property Standard			
	Para's: 5.4, 5.7, 5.8			
DLT			✓	✓
Director Landlord Services			✓	✓
Director Housing Options			✓	✓
Operational Business Manager	✓	✓	✓	✓

7 Breaches and non-compliance

7.1 Customer feedback

7.1.1 Tenants are encouraged to deliver feedback on satisfaction surveys and officer visits.

7.1.2 If a tenant feels the property does not meet the standards set out in this policy, they are encouraged to raise a complaint for investigation.

7.2 CHL assurance

7.2.1 CHL will ensure annual quality inspections are conducted.

7.2.2 Breaches of this policy will result in penalties as defined by service level agreements and/or disciplinary action.

8. Measurements

8.1 The success of the policy will be measured against three performance indicators:

1. Satisfaction with void works
2. Average re-let times – Standard works
3. Average cost of a void repair

9. Evaluation and review

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed annually in quarter four of the financial year.

Alternative formats

Furvasow Erel

If you would like this information on audio CD, audio tape, Braille, large print, any other format or interpreted in a language other than English, please contact:-

Mar mynnowgh hwi kavos an kedhlow ma war son-sidi, sonsnod, yn Braille, prynt bras, furvas aral po styrys yn taves dres Sowsnek, kesteveugh mar pleg: -

Address

Cornwall Housing Ltd
Chy Trevail
Beacon Technology Park
Bodmin
Cornwall
PL31 2FR

Telephone

General enquiries: **0300 1234 161**

Text: **07941 712 712**

Email

General enquiries: info@cornwallhousing.org.uk

Website

www.cornwallhousing.org.uk