

Voids Policy

Version Control						
Version	Date drafted	Date approved	Approved by	Date reviewed	Next review date	Owner
Final	16/03/2023	27/03/2023	Board	27/03/2023	16/03/2025	Head of Property and Assets
2025 Review			Board	24/03/2025	24/03/2027	Head of Property and Assets

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Westmoreland Supported Housing Limited (WSHL) provides Specialised Supported Housing. We work with Care Providers to deliver support for vulnerable adults with complex learning and physical disabilities and those with mental health needs enabling them to live independently often as an alternative to a care home.
- 1.2 From time to time, WSHL will have void properties within its portfolio of properties: these are units which are currently empty because a tenancy has ended and a new tenancy has not yet started. Voids may arise due to formal termination of a tenancy, abandonment of a tenancy, the tenant transferring to another tenancy, eviction of the tenant or the tenant's death.
- 1.3 Because rent cannot be charged on a void property, but WSHL is still liable to meet all costs of operating the property, WSHL incurs financial losses for as long as the property is empty. Therefore, it is in WSHL's interests to keep void losses to a minimum by ensuring all void properties are ready to let to appropriate applicants as soon as possible.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out WSHL's approach when dealing with void properties to ensure that WSHL provides an efficient and customer focused service which:
 - complies with regulatory and legislative requirements;
 - ensures value for money in repairing void properties and achieving the relet standard;
 - balances the need to minimise rent loss whilst letting empty properties to the right applicant in terms of our allocations policy, so ensuring best use of the property; and
 - maximises customer satisfaction in relation to the standard of their new home.
- 2.2 The specific objectives of this policy are:
 - To minimise the loss of rental income as a result of properties being empty;
 - To ensure that WSHL makes the most effective use of its housing stock to let to the best matched applicant;

- To ensure that tenants and prospective tenants understand the basis for our decisions in managing vacant properties and organising for these to be relet quickly and appropriately;
- To ensure that properties are brought up to a consistent and acceptable standard when let; and
- To ensure that staff are well trained and supported to deliver a high-quality service which meets tenants' needs.

3 Approach

- 3.1 Day-to-day responsibility for the operation and monitoring of this policy lies with the appropriate managers within the Housing and Assets Teams. All Housing and Asset team employees have a responsibility to ensure that this policy is applied as instructed.
- 3.2 Once WSHL knows that a tenant is vacating the property, the void process starts. The Housing Officer will arrange a visit during the tenant's notice period and create a void specification to ensure the property meets the minimum standard to be relet.
- 3.3 Once completed, the Housing Officer will submit the void specification to WSHL's repairs contractor along with the expected date that the property will become void, so that the contractor can plan the works and be ready to start as soon as possible after the property becomes empty.
- 3.4 If the required works are already part of the agreed basket rates (Decoration, Kitchen, Bathroom, Flooring, all Property Compliance Checks) and the cost of any ad-hoc items is less than £300 in aggregate then the repairs contractor should accept the works without further recourse to WSHL. Where additional works in excess of £300 + VAT are required, the repairs contractor will obtain a quote and send this to WSHL within five working days for approval.
- 3.5 The quotation will be reviewed and agreed by one of WSHL's Surveyors prior to any works commencing.
- 3.6 If the void requires major works, one of WSHL's Surveyors will inspect and create a specification of works and submit this to the repairs contractor, so that the contractor can then source quotes.
- 3.7 The service level agreement with the repairs contractor will be ten working days from the quote being approved to completion of the works and uploading any completion photos, unless agreed otherwise in advance.
- 3.8 A weekly phone call will take place between the Contract Manager employed by the repairs contractor, WSHL's Housing Managers and Surveyors to review the status of all voids and to update the tracker.
- 3.9 WSHL's Surveyors will manage the repairs contractor, approve costs and provide technical assistance when required.

4 Approval Limits

- 4.1 As per 3.4, the repairs contractor is authorised to accept additional void works outside of any agreed basket rates with a value of up to £300 + VAT.
- 4.2 WSHL's Surveyors can authorise works up to a total of £2,500 + VAT for any individual void property.
- 4.3 If the total value of works required is greater than £2,500 + VAT, the cost must be approved by the Head of Property and Assets prior to committing to the spend.
- 4.4 Where the Head of Property and Assets is not available to approve the works, the cost may be approved by an Executive Director.

5 WSHL's Void Standard

5.1 The dwelling should be safe and compliant:

- 5.1.1 The gas installation, including any fixed appliances should be tested, and certified working safe in compliance with current regulations including a CO Detector. Where there is an overdue gas service or the annual gas service is due within the 60-day period, the appliance(s) will also be serviced as part of the overall voids work.
- 5.1.2 The dwelling should be checked for damp. If minor damp is detected, then this will be treated as part of the voids work. Any major damp issues should be referred to the Building Surveyor. This damp check should also include checking ground floors and cellars where applicable.
- 5.1.3 Any fire doors and fire prevention mechanisms will be checked and if necessary repaired.
- 5.1.4 Stair treads, banisters, and any handrails both inside and outside the dwelling should be checked for security. If the property does not have a handrail to any stair between the ground and upper storeys, then one is to be provided.
- 5.1.5 Floorboards and any fixed floor coverings should be secure and free from any tripping hazards.
- 5.1.6 Where found, any polystyrene ceiling tiles which have been fixed to the kitchen ceiling are to be removed and the ceiling made good if required.
- 5.1.7 Where a whole property is void between the first day in December and the last day in February then the mains water supply to the dwelling will be turned off at the stop tap and all taps (hot and cold) opened to minimise risk of burst damage whilst empty. The central heating system will also be drained down. This will be identified as part of the void specification. Any voids that have been empty prior to December will be identified as part of the weekly void meeting.

- 5.1.8 Where a unit has its own electrical distribution system, the fixed wiring electrical installation should be tested and certified by a responsible contractor.
 - 5.1.9 Where asbestos is present, this will be assessed and managed in accordance with WSHL's Asbestos Management Policy.
 - 5.1.10 Each property will have a valid EPC prior to a tenant moving in the property with a rating between A and E.
 - 5.1.11 Toilet seats are to be intact and safely fitted.
 - 5.1.12 WC pans are to be replaced if they are found to be cracked.
- 5.2 The dwelling should be secure:
- 5.2.1 All doors and windows will be checked for ease of operation and security.
 - 5.2.2 External door locks will be changed and replaced with re-cycled locks from other void properties wherever possible.
 - 5.2.3 All windows must close and be able to either be latched or locked shut. Where windows benefit from existing window locks, these will be checked, and keys provided where possible.
 - 5.2.4 Door entry systems (where applicable) will be tested for correct operation.
 - 5.2.5 Any cracked or broken glass will be replaced.
- 5.3 The dwelling should be clean:
- 5.3.1 All furniture, rubbish, remaining goods, personal effects, loose electrical equipment, and clothes will be disposed of. All waste material is to be removed from the property and taken on the day of removal to a licensed disposal or storage site as appropriate.
 - 5.3.2 WSHL will arrange for fumigation or other appropriate treatment of a void to take place if evidence of vermin or insect infestation is found.
 - 5.3.3 Cleaning is to be done using appropriate cleaning equipment and safe cleaning materials.
 - 5.3.4 All floors and stairs are to be swept and wet mopped. Bathroom floors are to be disinfected.
 - 5.3.5 Any excess moisture or water is to be fully removed as part of the cleaning process.
 - 5.3.6 All scuffs and paint splashes will be removed where possible.

- 5.3.7 Any areas of 'Black Mould' are to be washed down with an appropriate anti-fungicide in accordance with WSHL's Damp and Other Hazards Policy. If mould is visible on or beneath the wallpaper, the wallpaper shall be removed and mould treatment works carried out accordingly. Mould affected grouting or sealant will be treated or replaced.
- 5.3.8 Any loose wall coverings will be removed.
- 5.3.9 All doors (including both sides of any external doors), doorframes, architraves, skirting boards, internal windows, window frames, sills, radiators (including behind the radiator) and pipe work will be cleaned.
- 5.3.10 All drawing pins, nails, screws, picture hooks, carpet grippers, fixings, and the like will be removed from all surfaces.
- 5.3.11 All electrical sockets, light fittings and switches are to be thoroughly cleaned. If electrical fittings are badly stained (i.e. badly ingrained staining which cannot easily be cleaned off) then these should be replaced.
- 5.3.12 Cobwebs are to be removed from all areas.
- 5.3.13 Kitchen units, including all work surfaces, cupboards, drawers, boiler casings, cooker hobs, ovens, extractor fans / cooker extractor units, sinks, baths, showers, wash hand basins, tile splash backs, taps, WC pans, WC seats, cisterns and pipework are to be cleaned and sanitised.
- 5.4 Flooring and decoration in the dwelling should meet WSHL's standards:
- 5.4.1 All laminate flooring and loose floor coverings (carpets and the like) is to be retained unless it is in a poor or unsafe condition.
- 5.4.2 Where a replacement of any flooring is necessary, the appropriate item(s) will be chosen as part of the major works specification drawn up by WSHL's Surveyor. Input from the Care Provider may be sought in respect of colour choices.
- 5.4.3 A deep clean of the property (as per 5.3) may be sufficient in some cases. However, if the decoration is not to a fair standard and further works are required, WSHL will provide the following:
- A redecoration of the room, with the general decoration consisting of filling and sanding the walls, application of a single mist coat and two coats of Dulux Easycare Washable and Tough Matt paint (or a suitable equivalent). All void room walls will be painted in Dulux Easycare Brilliant White (or a suitable equivalent).
 - Ceilings will receive two coats of Dulux Matt Brilliant White (or a suitable equivalent).
 - Woodwork decoration, consisting of rubbing down and filling the woodwork along with two coats of Dulux Brilliant White oil-based Gloss or a Brilliant White Satin (or a suitable equivalent).

5.5 Other works that need to be carried out in void rooms will be instructed on an ad-hoc basis based on specifications prepared by WSHL's Surveyors.

6 Linked Documents

6.1 This policy is linked to the following documents and should be read in conjunction:

- Asbestos Management Policy
- Damp and Other Hazards Policy
- Electrical Safety Policy
- Gas Safety Policy

6.2 Operation of this policy will be supported by an internal Voids Procedure that provides a more detailed description of the processes to be followed by WSHL employees and contractors.

7 Policy Review

7.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years.