

## **VOIDS AND MUTUAL EXCHANGE POLICY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Council as 'Landlord' is responsible for the maintenance, repair and replacement of the structure and common parts of its Housing properties as set out in the Tenancy Agreement.
- 1.2 A review has been carried out to the standards of work that the Council carries out to void properties. This was identified as a priority action by the Executive Head of Governance and Housing, when the fundamental review of Housing Maintenance was carried out in Summer 2019.
- 1.3 This report deals with the arrangements for the statutory inspections and the repair, condition and safety standards of void properties and the new standards that will apply prior to letting. It also details the arrangements to reduce the risk of vandalism, theft, flood and arson to properties whilst void and it also covers mutual exchanges. The new proposed Policy is attached at Appendix 1.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Council processes over 250 Council owned properties through void or tenancy transfers resulting from mutual exchange and is under legal duty to maintain the structure and fixtures of these properties, including their communal areas.
- 2.2 The Council is committed to providing an effective void maintenance service in order to comply with its statutory responsibilities, including but not limited to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (as amended) and the Housing Act 2004 and to ensure high levels of resident satisfaction and to protect the value of its housing stock.
- 2.3 The Council is also committed to ensuring that empty properties are turned around at the earliest opportunity, not only to safeguard against rent loss but to reduce the Council's waiting list for council properties. It is important that properties are re-let in an acceptable condition.
- 2.4 A thorough review of void processing and maintenance and repairs standards has been undertaken by Housing Management which has resulted in a new Voids and Mutual Exchange Policy for Housing (Landlord Services).

This proposed policy will sit alongside a suite of other new policies set out below:-

- Electrical Safety Policy;
- Fire Safety Policy;
- Gas Safety Policy;
- Legionella Policy;
- Lifts and Lifting Equipment Policy;
- Maintenance and Repairs Policy

### **3. THE NEW VOIDS AND MUTUAL EXCHANGE POLICY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)**

3.1 The new Voids and Mutual Exchange Policy addresses the 'Landlord' duties and responsibilities within Housing specific properties as well as improving on the level of the existing standards, ensuring that Council properties are fit for modern living and for the enjoyment of tenants in creating their new home. These improvements include:-

- Decoration that is bright, fresh and welcoming;
- Properties are functional and meet the needs of modern living;
- Improved cleaning standards both internally and externally;
- The ability to be offered and enjoy items left by previous tenants that are found to be in good serviceable condition.

3.2 The new Policy's salient points are as follows:

- (a) Clearly sets out the key principles for the maintenance and repair of Council owned void properties;
- (b) Clearly identifying legislative and regulatory duties;
- (c) Clear definition of roles and responsibilities;
- (d) Provides a flexible, customer-oriented void property management and maintenance service that gives priority to the safety, comfort and condition of properties to meet the needs of modern living;
- (e) Clearly sets out all reasonable steps to be taken to protect void properties from the risk of vandalism, theft, flood and arson;
- (f) Arrangements to ensure void properties are turned around as quickly as possible to minimise rent loss and provide homes to those most in need;
- (g) Arrangements to meet the Council's legal and contractual obligations;
- (h) Arrangements to ensure that prior to letting, void properties meet the safety, performance and quality standards set by the Council;
- (i) Arrangements for the recovery of costs from rechargeable works that are the responsibility of Tenant's.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 This Voids and Mutual Exchange Policy sets out the Council's approach in maintaining and processing void properties by being specific to Housing Landlord Services, to achieve statutory legislative requirements, and clearly defines roles and responsibilities. It improves upon existing standards. The draft policy was presented to the Housing Resident Involvement Group on 10 January 2020 who endorsed it very positively.

4.2 It is intended that the new Voids and Mutual Exchange Policy for Housing Landlord Services is implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, following formal approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There will be an increase in costs to the HRA Account associated with the introduction of new and enhanced void standards. The Council carries out void works to over 300 properties a year and materials alone to meet the new standards will be approximately £100,000. Additionally, there will be a further £100,000 attributable to

staffing costs in relation to the new standards, the latter having been identified within the July 2019 Housing Maintenance review report.

- 5.2 An annual budget funded by the HRA is required to implement and support this policy and this will be agreed as part of the Council's annual budget setting process.

## **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider the proposed Voids and Mutual Exchange Policy and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services.

### **For further information contact:**

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### **Background Papers:**

Public documents.