



## Organisational Policy

### Void Management Policy

#### **Our Commitment**

*Argyll Community Housing Association Group is committed to provide equal opportunities across all services and to avoid discrimination. This policy is intended to assist The ACHA Group to put this commitment into practice. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.*

***This policy can be made available in other formats, for example in large print, audio-format or Braille: the document may also be available in other languages, in full or summary form, as appropriate.***

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#### Section 1 – Context

**1.1** Argyll Community Housing Association Ltd (ACHA) is the registered social landlord for over 5,000 properties within the Argyll & Bute area.

Void management is a core function of ACHA and is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) used by the Scottish Housing Regulator when assessing a social landlord's overall performance.

ACHA adopts the definition of a void property as ***“any property that has no tenant for a period of time”***. Or in simplest terms, ***“when there is no person liable for the rent during the period the property is empty”***.

This policy describes the activities and responsibilities involved in re-letting existing ACHA properties and is supported by Void Management Procedures which include processes for the effective management, monitoring, repair and re-let of properties, together with a procedure for dealing with low demand properties.

#### Section 2 – The Law, Good Practice and links to other ACHA Policies and Strategies

**2.1** In order to effectively deliver the aims and obligations of this policy, ACHA will meet the requirements of:-

- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 1988, 2001, 2010, 2014
- Homeless (Scotland) Act 2003
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981
- Scottish Secure Tenants (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 2002
- Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) Regulations 2008
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Building (Scotland) Act 2003
- Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 1994
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

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- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 Performance Standards for Registered Social Landlords in Scotland as detailed within the Scottish Housing Charter
- The terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement or any other lease agreement in place.

#### 2.2 ACHA Policy and Strategy Links

- Abandonment Policy
- ACHA Business Plan
- Adaptation Policy
- Asbestos Management Policy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Compensation for Improvements Policy
- Gas Safety Policy
- Heating Policy
- HOME Argyll Allocations Policy
- Health and Safety Policies
- Investment & Regeneration Annual Plan
- Legionella Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Repairs & Maintenance Policy
- Tenant Involvement Strategy

### Section 3 – Our Policy Aims and Objectives

**3.1** ACHA's objective is to ensure that we minimise rent loss by turning around empty properties quickly and efficiently. This policy reflects legislation and current good practice in void management.

The specific objectives of this Policy are to achieve the following:

- To ensure that voids are re-let as quickly as possible to meet the demand for the Association's properties
- Make the best use of the housing stock and meet the needs of applicants
- To deliver quality accommodation

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- Keep void properties in a safe and well-kept condition for the protection of tenants, the property and general appearance
- To comply with legal duties, regulatory requirements and good practice standards
- Minimise rent loss and Council Tax charges as a result of properties being empty
- Deliver an excellent customer experience

#### Section 4 – Implementing Our Policy Objectives

**4.1** To achieve the above objectives, the ACHA Group will:

- Provide a clear statement of the level of service and standards to which ACHA will work
- Have procedures and agreed practices that are applied uniformly across the service
- Re-let vacant properties as quickly as possible
- Undertake repairs of vacant properties in accordance with ACHA's letting standard and statutory responsibilities
- Ensure that the condition of the property is of a standard that will not normally lead to an offer of accommodation being refused
- Ensure that all offers of accommodation are consistent with HOME Argyll (the Common Housing Register which ACHA is a member of) allocations policies
- Record any action taken at each stage in the void management process
- Provide training to ensure that staff are equipped to carry out the roles expected of them
- Keep tenants and service users informed during the void management process
- Consider appropriate initiatives to overcome the issue of low demand properties and to make properties that fall into this category more appealing

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#### 4.2 Definition of Void Properties

ACHA identifies that there are different ways a property can become void and defines them as follows:

- **Abandonment** – Where ACHA issues a statutory notice to a tenant who has vacated the property without notice and repossesses the property.
- **Death of Tenant** – Where ACHA are notified of the death of a tenant and there is no successor.
- **Decants** – Where a tenant has to be moved, usually temporarily, from their property for the purposes of refurbishment or as a result of the property becoming uninhabitable, e.g. fire, flood.

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- **Eviction** – Where ACHA completes court action to evict a tenant.
- **Formal Termination** - Where the tenant gives ACHA 28 days written notice as per the terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy, Short Scottish Secure Tenancy or Occupancy Agreement of their intention to leave the property or when the tenancy comes to its end point.
- **New Build Voids and Property Acquisitions** – Where a new or purchased property is handed over to ACHA as complete and is untenanted.
- **Transfers** – Where the tenant is re-housed by ACHA or another HOME Argyll partner.

#### 4.3 Low Demand Properties

**4.3.1** ACHA regularly monitors and reviews key performance information to ensure that low demand properties are quickly identified and make use a range of initiatives to address low demand properties, taking a 'tailored approach'. ACHA's Asset Management Strategy is linked to the Void Management Policy to ensure longer term solutions for properties that are continually difficult to let.

ACHA regularly review and monitor our Common Allocations Policy (HOME Argyll) to ensure this has a positive effect on areas that are difficult to let and monitor environmental spend where properties are difficult to let and suffer from high turnover.

#### 4.3.2 Definition of Low Demand Properties

A low demand property (empty or occupied) is a property where one or more of the following symptoms are exhibited:

- a small or non-existent waiting list for the property
- tenancy offers on a dwelling are frequently refused for reasons other than personal reasons
- higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover for a property in an area.

For the purpose of this policy, a property is difficult to let if it has had three or more refusals, or it is within a scheme where there is a turnover of 20% or more in any year.

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#### 4.3.3 Initiatives to address Low Demand:

Where a property or development has been designated as Low Demand, initiatives can be implemented for that property or development. The reasons and possible solutions are likely to be different in each case.

The Initiatives can include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

- Advertising properties through HOME Argyll website and Association Website, local offices and local and national press
- Advertising at Local Community Events, surgeries, hospitals, CAB
- Extending times for convenient viewing appointments (include evenings and weekends)
- Collaboration with partners, including leasing properties for homeless, refugees etc
- Offer to applicants not usually eligible for the property (i.e. permit under-occupation) where waiting lists have been exhausted
- Enhanced new tenant pack (i.e. light bulbs, cleaning materials, batteries)
- Offering a “garden tidy”
- Offering a White Goods Allowance
- Enhanced Décor Allowances
- Bringing forward Scottish Housing Quality Standard works
- Environmental Improvements
- Offering rent free weeks

#### 4.4 Inspections & Rechargeable Repairs

**4.4.1** ACHA recognises that inspections are a vital element of good void management practice and the purpose is to ensure that maintenance costs incurred as a consequence of the property becoming void are minimised and that the outgoing tenant is informed of outstanding repairs or redecoration which are their responsibility and which, if not undertaken, will result in a rechargeable repair.

**4.4.2** The association will pursue tenants for rechargeable costs arising from the termination of their tenancy.

#### 4.5 The Right to Compensation for Improvements

ACHA recognises that some outgoing tenants may have the right to receive compensation for certain approved improvement works that have been



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carried out during their tenancy as outlined in our Compensation and Redress Procedure.

#### 4.6 Allocations

ACHA will pre-select an applicant for a vacant property as soon as possible after the termination notice has been received. This is to minimise any void rental loss.

#### 4.7 Minimum Letting Standards

**4.7.1** We provide much needed homes to applicants from our waiting lists and aim to re-let void properties as quickly as possible to meet this demand and also to minimise rental income loss. We operate to a minimum lettings standard and aim to re-let properties which are suitable for immediate occupation. From time to time minor works will be carried out after the new tenant has moved in.

**4.7.2** All void properties which have gas appliances will be subject to a gas safety check prior to the new tenant moving in. All void properties will also have a valid Electrical Safety Certificate and an Energy Performance Certificate will be provided as close to the tenancy start date as practicably possible.

**4.7.3** ACHA has defined a condition standard to which a property will be brought up to before letting it to a new tenant. This is known as the Minimum Letting Standard. It is the standard which ensures a house is safe and secure for occupation. Before a property is re-let, all repairs which are considered essential to make the property habitable for health and safety and security will be done.

The Minimum Letting Standard is shown in Appendix 1.

### Section 5 – Performance Management and the Scottish Social Housing Charter

**5.1** ACHA operates within a performance management framework which reports to and aims to meet the requirements of our tenants, factored owners, Board of Management, the Scottish Housing Regulator and the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

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As required by Section 31 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, the Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities:

- **Charter Ref.1 – Equalities**

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

- **Charter Ref.4 – Quality of Housing**

Social landlords manage their business so that:

- Tenants homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), and continue to meet it thereafter and are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair when they are allocated.

- **Charter Ref.13 – Value for Money**

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:

- Tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

We use Regulatory and local performance indicators to monitor and report on our void performance.

**5.2** Internally, performance will be monitored by ACHA's Leadership Team, Senior Management Team and by the Board of Management. Performance information will also be provided, at least annually to our tenants.

**5.3** Externally, the Scottish Housing Regulator will monitor performance in terms of outcomes and standards achieved in line with the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. We will, annually, submit key performance information on our achievements to the Regulator.

**5.4** Performance data will be collected using a number of methods and is detailed in Appendix 2.

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#### Section 6 – Development and Training

**6.1** ACHA is committed to training and developing staff and the Board in order that they have a good knowledge of the procedures and systems in place for void management that meets the expectations of its stakeholders.

#### Section 7 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

**7.1** An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken and no negative impact on equality was identified. ACHA Group will apply this policy fairly and consistently. In implementing this policy, we will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people because of their race, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, or any other grounds. Our commitment to equality and fairness will apply irrespective of factors such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or other personal attributes.

#### Section 8 - Responsibilities

**8.1** The Director of Customer Experience has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Void Management Policy. The Regional Managers and Local Managers are responsible for ensuring the Housing Officers, HANSAs and Letting Assistants implement the tenancy and letting elements of the policy. This includes pre-terminations, ending the tenancy, the allocations process and settling-in visits.

**8.2** The Property Services Team are responsible for undertaking a 10% quality control check of all voids to ensure that they meet the minimum re-let standard. The Property Service Team provide information to AHFA at the start of the void period on compliance items such as gas servicing, electrical checks and service dates for all other heating types. The Property Services Team are responsible for arranging the removal of any asbestos found in a void property.

**8.3** Argyll Homes for All (AHFA) and other contractors have responsibility for the implementation of the void repair elements of the policy. With regard to void repairs undertaken by AHFA, the Operations Managers are

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responsible for managing the elements of the repairs, safety checks, repairing the property to the agreed minimum re-let standard (Appendix 1) and post inspections.

#### Section 9 – Review Procedures

**9.1** This policy will be reviewed every five years or earlier if required due to substantive changes in legislation or regulatory requirements.

**9.2** The policy will be reviewed in consultation with ACHA tenants and wider stakeholder partners.

#### Section 10 – Confidentiality and Data Protection

**10.1** All information provided by customers will only be used for the purpose provided. We will ensure that we meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). We will process and retain personal information in compliance with current data protection legislation and regulations.

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<b>Next Review Date</b>	February 2029

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#### Appendix 1

##### Minimum Letting Standard

This is the minimum standard to which all houses should be brought before being re-let. It is the standard which makes a house safe and secure for occupation.

Before a property is re-let all repairs which are considered essential to make the property habitable for health and safety and security will be done.

<b>GENERAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All houses will meet the minimum re-let standard before being re-let and will meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).</li><li>• This is the standard which makes a house safe and secure for occupation.</li><li>• The property will be wind and watertight and free from rising and penetrating damp.</li></ul>
<b>CLEANLINESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All items of furnishings other than those to be left for the incoming tenants should be cleared from the house, cellars and roof spaces.</li><li>• Floors will be swept and free from remnants of floor coverings.</li><li>• All sanitary wares must be clean, functional and free from blockages, leaks and corrosion.</li><li>• All skirtings, doors and facings, windowsills and frames will be cleaned and washed down.</li></ul>
<b>WINDOWS AND DOORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Windows and doors will open easily and defective locks will be replaced.</li><li>• Window keys should be issued to tenants where fitted locks are installed.</li><li>• Door Entry systems will be in working order and if not, a full explanation will be given with a date for repair.</li><li>• All kitchen pass doors will be solid core for fire safety reasons.</li></ul>
<b>SERVICES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All services, water, electricity, and gas (where applicable) will be functioning. The services</li></ul>

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	<p>will be checked and confirmed safe. Safety certificates will be provided to tenants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful consideration should be to the ACHA Group Legionella Policy.</li> <li>• Hard wired or interlinked heat, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors will be fitted in line with Scottish Government Regulations.</li> <li>• An Energy Performance certificate will be provided for the property.</li> </ul>
<b>KITCHENS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each kitchen will have at least a sink unit and base, plus one 1000mm base unit and 1000mm wall unit or equivalent for storage and at least 1.2m worktop, where physically possible. Kitchen units will have doors, which open and close properly and all fittings will be secure. Drawers in units will run freely and have proper handles attached.</li> <li>• The kitchen should have a hot and cold water supply to the sink which is in good and usable condition.</li> <li>• The kitchen facilities should be laid out in such a way that the occupants should be able to use the kitchen facilities (in particular the sink and the cooker) safely.</li> <li>• In the kitchen we will aim to have at least 6 x 13 amp electrical power sockets securely mounted on the wall.</li> <li>• The kitchen must have at least 1m<sup>3</sup> of food storage space either in the kitchen itself or immediately adjacent to the kitchen e.g. in a pantry (this excludes the kitchen sink).</li> <li>• If a complete new kitchen is required, this will be comparable to the standard fitted in the Investment Programme.</li> <li>• Damaged worktops, as a result of burning/water ingress will be repaired or replaced where appropriate. If we are unable to match the damaged section, all worktops</li> </ul>

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	<p>will be replaced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All kitchens will include a cooker and washing machine connection point.</li> </ul>
<b>BATHROOMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All sanitary wares must be clean, functional, and free from blockages, leaks, and corrosion and will be repaired or replaced as required.</li> <li>Baths, wash hand basins and WC's will be resealed as appropriate.</li> </ul>
<b>DECORATION AND PAINTERWORK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Torn, damaged or vandalised wallpaper will be stripped back, and all walls left to a good finish for the new tenant to decorate.</li> <li>There will be no polystyrene decorative finishes in the property.</li> <li>All loose and missing floorboards will be re-secured/replaced.</li> <li>Floor surfaces will be even to allow carpets to be laid.</li> <li>Missing or badly damaged skirtings/facings will be replaced. Where it is possible to repair, they will be re-secured and filled where necessary.</li> </ul>
<b>BALCONY/VERANDAS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where appropriate, balconies/verandas will be cleared of any rubbish or bird faeces.</li> </ul>
<b>EXTERNAL/OUTDOOR AREAS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A secure handrail will be provided in close stairwells and houses where there is a flight of internal stairs.</li> <li>Access to the property will be safe. All boundary fencing and gates, where there is a Health and Safety issue, will be in sound condition. Paths and steps will be checked and repaired where they are in an unsafe condition.</li> <li>If the garden area is in an exceptionally poor condition, we will arrange for the lawn to be cut and the garden tidied.</li> <li>The external condition of the property will be checked through a visual inspection of the roof, gutters, chimneys etc.</li> </ul>

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<b>SERVICES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Installations by former tenants approved by ACHA, will be left in the property if deemed safe and in good decorative order by ACHA. The incoming tenant will be required to sign a mandate for such installations.</li><li>• All medical adaptations should be inspected to ensure that they are fully operational and meet with the needs of the incoming tenant where possible.</li></ul>
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#### Appendix 2

##### Performance Data

##### **Statutory Performance Indicators – Social Housing Charter**

- Percentage of rent lost through properties being empty during the last year
- Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with the standard of their home when moving in
- Percentage of tenancy offers refused during the year
- Percentage of lettable houses that become vacant in the last year
- Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year, by source of let

##### **Additional Local Performance Indicators**

- Total number of properties re-let per month
- Total number of calendar days properties were empty
- Total number of voids “in management” and “out of management” per month
- Current status of voids in repairs process per month
- Current status of voids in housing process per month
- Number of Lets v’s terminations per month
- Total number of terminations per month
- Total number of refusals per month

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