



	<b>Organisation Name</b> Somers Community Housing Trust	<b>Version: 2</b>
<b>Policy</b>	Empty (Void) Properties Management	
<b>Ref</b>	H:Policies/Empty Properties (Voids)	
<b>Staff affected</b>	Lettings Services, Neighbourhoods, Older Persons', Gas and Repairs teams	<b>Effective Date:</b> <b>May 2010</b>
<b>Approved by</b>	SCHT Board	<b>Approval Date:</b> <b>May 2010</b>
<b>Lead Officer/ Policy Owner</b>	Director of Customer Services (Housing & Support)	<b>Review Date:</b> <b>May 2013</b>

### **Policy Statement**

Somers Community Housing Trust is committed to making the most effective use of its housing stock in order to maximise rental income, meet housing need and maintain good estate management.

Somers Community Housing Trust will adopt a pro-active approach to empty property management to ensure that empty (void) properties are re-let as quickly as possible, achieving set targets and standards.

### **1. Scope**

1.1 This policy applies to all SCHT homes that become vacant. It covers the period of time from when a property becomes empty to the handover of keys to the new tenant.

### **2. Responsibilities**

2.1 The Director of Customer Services (Housing & Support) has overall responsibility for the policy and its related procedures.

- 2.2 The Assistant Director Tenancy Services and the Lettings Services Manager have operational responsibility for ensuring adherence to the policy and procedures.
- 2.3 Lettings Services team officers and tradestaff have operational responsibility for the procedures which underpin this policy and support the efficient letting of the Trust's empty homes.

### **3. Definitions**

3.1 **Void** – the term used to describe a property that has become empty for one of the following reasons:

- The tenant has given four weeks' notice
- The keys have been returned to the Trust without notice
- The property has been abandoned
- The tenant has died, leaving no eligible successor
- Transfer of the existing tenant
- The tenant has been evicted.

**Void Date** - the date at which the previous tenant's notice expires and the home has been vacated.

### **4. Principles**

4.1 **We will ensure that we manage voids efficiently and effectively, demonstrating value for money:**

- 4.1.1 We will make tenants fully aware of their responsibilities and end of tenancy obligations when signing their tenancy agreement. We will reinforce this at the new tenancy visit which takes place 6 weeks after the start of the new tenancy.
- 4.1.2 We will enforce conditions set out in the tenancy agreement, including the notice period and payment for rechargeable repairs.
- 4.1.3 We will ensure that procedures are in place to identify as early as possible when a property becomes empty.
- 4.1.4 We will ensure for all empty properties that the tenancy is legally terminated and possession lawfully recovered.
- 4.1.5 We will ensure that all voids are repaired and re-let in accordance with closely monitored target timescales to keep our re-let times to a minimum.
- 4.1.6 We will ensure that all voids are repaired in accordance with closely monitored budgetary targets timescale and benchmark our costs against other associations for cost comparison.

- 4.1.7 We will minimise the percentage of the housing stock that is empty at any one time.
- 4.1.8 We will offer incentives where appropriate to tenants to leave their property in a clean and reasonable condition.
- 4.1.9 We will not decorate properties, unless they are in very poor condition, if the tenant is elderly or disabled or if the property is deemed 'hard to let'. In all other cases, we will provide assistance with decoration costs which reflect the need for decoration.
- 4.1.10 We will closely monitor demand for our properties. Where we identify low demand, we will undertake an assessment to understand the reasons for the low demand.
- 4.1.11 We will consider implementing innovative letting solutions aimed at reducing empty properties and meeting specific local need.

## **4.2 We will be customer focused:**

- 4.2.1 We will have a published Voids Standard of repair and cleanliness, drawn up and reviewed with tenants. This will be given to all new tenants at letting.
- 4.2.2 We will ensure that all void properties achieve the Void Standard before they are re-let.
- 4.2.3 We will seek out customer satisfaction with our service and provide tenants with a range of ways to give feedback, including exit surveys, tenant inspectors and satisfaction questionnaires.
- 4.2.4 We will evaluate the feedback we receive from customers and learn from it to improve service quality and satisfaction.
- 4.2.5 We will report back to tenants any improvements we have made to the management of our voids as a result of their feedback.
- 4.2.6 We will ensure that void properties do not impact negatively on the local community whilst they remain empty.
- 4.2.6 We will ensure that all required health and safety checks are undertaken before letting, providing the tenant with copies of all applicable health and safety certificates at the time of letting.
- 4.2.7 We will endeavour to ensure our homes are as energy efficient as possible, with particular regard to affordable warmth and provide tenants with a copy of the property's energy rating certificate at the time of letting.

## **5. Monitoring and Reporting**

5.1 The performance of the Lettings Services team in achieving efficient void turnaround times and completing works to, or above the agreed Voids Standard, will be closely monitored against each relevant target within the void process and any issues should be reported to the Director of Customer Services (Housing & Support).

5.2 Overall performance of the Lettings Service will be monitored monthly by the Trust Management Team and will be reported quarterly to the Somer Residents' Committee and the Trust's Board of Management. Monitoring will include:

- average time to relet a general needs property
- average time to relet a sheltered property
- number of lettings
- % total homes vacant
- % general needs properties vacant & available to let
- % general needs properties vacant & unavailable to let
- % sheltered properties vacant & available to let
- % sheltered properties vacant & unavailable to let
- % Voids loss
- number of voids completed
- void turnaround time
- average void cost
- % voids meeting Voids Standard
- % customer satisfaction with new home
- % customer satisfaction with lettings service.

5.3 Performance will be measured against defined targets. Targets will be set annually by:

- reviewing the performance of the previous year
- benchmarking performance against other RSLs through Housemark
- taking into account any external factors e.g. a lower demand for particular properties.

## **6. Application**

6.1 A set of procedures accompany this policy which support the aim to re-let properties as quickly as possible whilst meeting the Voids Standard and achieving high levels of customer satisfaction. These include:

- Void categories
- Voids process
- Responsible officers
- Target timescales for different void categories and for each stage of the voids process.

## 7. Review

- 7.1 We will review this policy every 3 years or after changes in legislation or regulation, involving benchmarking against the best performing RSLs and tenant service users.

<b>Equalities Impact Assessment</b>	TBA
<b>Legal/Regulatory Framework</b>	TSA Standards – Home, Tenancy, Neighbourhood, Value for Money
<b>Performance &amp; Quality Framework</b>	KLOE 4, 6, 7, 30, 32 Decent Homes Standard
<b>Associated Policies &amp; Procedures and other documents</b>	Repairs and maintenance policy Abandoned property policy Allocations policy Re-chargeable policy Complaints policy Compensation policy Low Demand Policy Trust Service Standards VFM Strategy Tenancy Agreement Tenant Handbook
<b>Policy Category</b>	Housing Management Strategy
<b>Consultation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents' Committee/Focus Group</li> <li>• Affected Staff</li> <li>• Staff Council/Joint Staff Forum</li> <li>• Management Team</li> <li>• GX</li> </ul>	<p>June 2009, April 2010</p> <p>May 2009, March 2010-04-23</p> <p>March 2010</p>