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1.0 Policy Statement

1.1 This Policy outlines how Viewpoint Housing Association (VHA) will re-let its empty (void) properties, taking into account statutory and regulatory requirements.

1.2 Strategic Objectives

This policy supports the delivery of the following strategic objective:

Strategic Objective	Objective
Our Finances will support the changing needs of the business	To meet Year 1 target on void management

2.0 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Aim

It is Viewpoint Housing Association's aim that we won't let a property to a tenant that we wouldn't live in ourselves and that we minimise loss of rental income as a result of properties being empty.

2.2 The objectives of the Void Policy and Lettable Standard are to:

- Re-let vacant (void) properties as quickly as possible, and minimise the loss of rental income as a result of properties being empty, subject to the properties meeting our Letting Standards (see Appendix 1),
- Achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction on the condition of the property when moving on
- the offers of tenancy being consistent with our Allocations Policy
- the sale of shared ownership properties being consistent with our Shared Ownership Eligibility and Prioritisation Policy

3.0 Legislation/Regulatory Requirements

3.1 The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Housing Regulator, sets the outcomes it expects social landlords to achieve for its residents.

3.2 Scottish Social Housing Charter

In terms of void management are, the relevant Social Housing Charter standards are:

Outcome 4: Quality of housing

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- *tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) when they are allocated; are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair; and also meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESSH) by December 2020.*

Outcome 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.*

3.3 Regulatory Requirements

Standard 2 – The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.

Standard 3 – The RSL manages its resources to ensure its financial well-being, while maintaining rents at a level that tenants can afford to pay.

4.0 Scope

- 4.1 This policy applies to all social rented and shared ownership properties which become void.

5.0 Void Targets

- 5.1 To ensure VHA prioritises the turnaround times of empty properties there is a target set annually by the Board, for the maximum average number of days between a property becoming vacant and it being re-let.

- 5.2 The average time for repairing properties between lets is:

5 working days – property requiring minimal maintenance e.g. safety checks and very minor repairs.

10 working days – higher level of maintenance required.

20 Working days – due to required upgrades e.g kitchen, bathroom, etc.

- 5.3 The above target times may change however if major works are identified within a void. These works may be the result of an insurance claim because of fire or flood damage or undergoing major repairs/ structural works, during which period it would be unsafe for them to be occupied as defined by the Scottish Housing Regulators technical guidance. However a void may only be placed under Long Term Void (LTV) after prior consultation with the Assets Team Leader or Head of Asset Management.
- 5.4 Similarly if a void property is due to be included in a forthcoming planned maintenance contract VHA may decide to bring the work forward in the void period and include it in modernisation as above.
- 5.5 To assist VHA in minimising void times, tenants will be reminded regularly, e.g. via the Newsletter/Website/ Social Media, that in accordance with their tenancy agreement they should give 28 days' written notice of their intention to terminate their tenancy. There are some circumstances where this does not apply and housing staff will advise accordingly. Information is also contained within their Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement and Tenant Handbook.

6.0 LETTINGS

- 6.1 All lettings will be made in accordance with our Allocations Policy.
- 6.2 All shared ownership sales will be made in accordance with our Shared Ownership Eligibility and Prioritisation Policy.

7.0 RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 7.1 This policy is supported by the following policies and/or procedures:
- Allocation Policy
 - Rechargeable Repairs
 - Relet Standard & Void repairs procedure
 - EPC procedure

- Tenants Handbook
- AMS
- ACM Policy and Procedure (asbestos)
- QL user guides
- Complaints Policy

8.0 Compliance & Support

8.1 The Director of Housing and Support and Director of Finance and Assets are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented by all staff concerned through the Head of Housing and Head of Asset Management

The table below outlines key areas of functional responsibility

Table 1: Key areas of functional responsibility: Housing and Assets

Housing	Assets
Notice received and End of tenancy processed	Property inspected
Allocations process instigated and followed	Repairs raised as required to ensure property meets lettable standard
Sign up carried out	Property inspected to ensure lettable standard met
Property let	Property confirmed as fit to let

8.2 It is the responsibility of all staff to familiarise themselves with the content of this policy and to ensure that they comply with the policy and associated procedures.

8.2 If advice or support is required, staff should approach their line manager.

9.0 Monitoring & Evaluation

9.1 Performance information will be recorded and reported on, as follows:

- To Viewpoint’s Board and other committees as relevant
- In our Landlord Performance Report
- Our annual returns to the appropriate regulatory bodies
- Within our benchmarking network

- 9.2 This Policy and the process underpinning it will be subject to our internal performance and quality monitoring systems.
- 9.3 This policy will be reviewed every three years or at a differing timescale depending on legislative requirements.

APPENDIX 1

LETTABLE STANDARD

We will aim to achieve these standards for every void property before it is occupied by a new tenant. The incoming tenant will be given a copy of the void and lettable standard to allow confirmation that works have been carried out in accordance with this policy.

This policy covers standard void properties. A separate policy covers mutual exchange properties, recognising the fact that while we aim to achieve the same standards, there will not be the same time period when the property will be empty to enable full safety checks and Energy Performance Certification to be carried out.

GENERAL ITEMS

1. Cleanliness

We will ensure that:

- 1.1 the house is cleared of furniture, carpets and belongings/rubbish from the previous tenant. Depending on their condition, curtains, floorcoverings or blinds left by the former tenant are left as a security measure and/or for possible use by the new tenant in agreement with the Maintenance Officer. If these items are retained by the new tenant, the tenant will be made aware that VHA has no responsibility/liability for these items at a later date.
- 1.2 floors are swept and washed if required.
- 1.3 kitchen and bathroom surfaces are washed down including tiled areas, bath panels and unit fronts, are mould free and seals clean. .
- 1.4 attics, cellars and out buildings are emptied.
- 1.5 the property is presented clean and in a "lettable standard" .

2. Repairs

We will ensure that:

- 2.1 all repairs relating to these standards are carried out before the new tenancy (apart from circumstances out with our control).

- 2.2 in exceptional circumstances where we are not able to carry out a repair, for example due to a delay in the delivery of a replacement internal door, and with the agreement of the new tenant, we complete the repair as soon as possible after the start of the new tenancy.
- 2.3 some replacement of existing fittings such as kitchen and bathroom and heating systems if still serviceable will be held over if a contract to carry out these works in the same area is being planned within the next 2 years.

2 Alterations & Improvements

We will ensure that:

- 3.1 any alterations & improvements carried out by the previous tenant have either been approved by us and are of an acceptable standard or, if they have not been approved by us and are of an unacceptable standard then they are removed and the property is re-instated with the costs being charged to the former tenant. We will give the outgoing tenant an opportunity to return the property to its previous standard before giving up the tenancy as part of pre termination inspection

4 Garden areas

Where possible we will ensure that:

- 4.1 gardens attached to the property are cleared of rubbish and any sheds left by former tenants that are in poor condition are removed (with the costs charged to the former tenant). If a shed is left in good condition this may be adopted by the incoming tenant. VHA will retain no liability for this once the tenancy has commenced.
- 4.2 during the growing season, if required, the grass is cut/strimmed as a 'one off' at the start of the tenancy.
- 4.3 where required, gardens are brought up to a reasonable standard, e.g. overgrown bushes and trees are trimmed or removed, excessive slabbing is removed, broken paving is renewed etc. and recharged to the former tenant if applicable.

Externals

5. Brickwork, external walls

We will ensure that:

- 5.1 external walls are sound so as to prevent the likelihood of water penetration.
- 5.2 there are no major defects.
- 5.3 any external building i.e. outhouse buildings are repaired or removed (if there are particular health & safety issues).

6 Roofs, gutters & downpipes (visual inspection from ground level)

We will ensure that:

- 6.1 roofs are weatherproof with no missing or slipped tiles/slates.
- 6.2 all existing flashing is in position and secure.
- 6.3 pointing is secure to ridge/hip/verges and eaves and is sufficient to ensure tiles etc. do not move or allow water ingress.
- 6.4 gutters and downpipes are clear of rubbish, sound and secure.

7 Footpaths, ramps, external steps & handrails, driveways

We will ensure that:

- 7.1 any such items to the front and rear entrances are reasonably smooth, free of tripping hazards, safe and any broken areas or potential dangerous areas are repaired.

8 Fencing, gates

We will ensure that:

- 8.1 boundary fencing and gates provided by us are in reasonably sound condition and free from defects that may cause injury (subject to agreement with adjacent owners where responsibility for boundary fencing is shared).
- 8.2 dividing fencing installed by a former tenant that is in good condition is left and the new tenant is advised that maintenance is their responsibility, but where the fencing is in poor condition it is removed and the boundary reinstated to the original

standard with the costs charged to the former tenant. Boundary areas will be explained to tenants.

9 Front and back doors

We will ensure that:

- 9.1 doors are securely hung and opening/closing freely.
- 9.2 there is a letterbox and back flap on all front doors.
- 9.3 we check for draughts, and for evidence of water ingress.
- 9.4 where there are both mortice and yale locks, both locks will be changed
- 9.5 we check on security and that spy holes and chains, where provided, are working.

10 Windows

We will ensure that:

- 10.1 all windows are fully operational, with sashes opening and closing freely.
- 10.2 all windows are secure and checked for safety.
- 10.3 window frames are sound and serviceable until the next cyclical painting programme.
- 10.4 there is no cracked glazing, and any major failing to double glazed unit seals are replaced.
- 10.5 ground floor windows are fitted with keyed locks as standard.
- 10.6 Restrictors will be fitted above ground level
- 10.6 where window locks are fitted, window keys are supplied or, if keys are missing, locks are replaced (costs charged to former tenant).
- 10.7 where trickle vents are fitted we ensure these are clean, operable and covers are present

- 10.8 External works not crucial to the re-letting of the property may be programmed outside of the void period. This would be particularly relevant if works are planned under planned maintenance contracts. Any work of a Health & Safety nature would always be made safe or completed before a new tenancy begins.

INTERNAL ITEMS

11 Electrics

We will ensure that:

- 11.1 all electrical fittings (including light fittings left by the former tenant that are not being removed) and fixed appliances (e.g. showers) are checked and a certificate of inspection issued to the new tenant (copy to be held by us).
- 11.2 any switches or socket outlets that are badly marked, covered by paint, smoke affected or damaged in any other way are replaced (costs charged to the former tenant).
- 11.3 where provided by us, TV aerial points are in position.
- 11.4 where relevant, an electric meter box key will be provided.
- 11.5 if there is any wires visible to tenants either in property or communal areas these should either be made safe but where possible boxed in

12 Gas

We will ensure that:

- 12.1 all houses with a gas supply have an appropriate void safety check.
- 12.2 a full gas safety check is undertaken and a compliance certificate is issued to the new tenant (copy to be held by ourselves).
- 12.3 A gas meter box key will be provided.
- 12.4 where applicable, the CO detector is included in the safety check and has a valid expiry date.

13 Gas/electric cooking

We will ensure that:

- 13.1 where the previous tenant has left a gas or electric cooker it is removed, as we will be unable to certify its safety. The outlet will then be left in a safe condition as defined by the relevant legislation.

14 Smoke alarm/carbon monoxide detector

We will ensure that:

- 14.1 the smoke alarm(s) is/are tested and cleaned as part of the electric safety check and are all within their valid expiry date.
 - 14.2 the carbon monoxide detector (where fitted) is tested and cleaned and is within their valid expiry date.
 - 14.3 the property is brought up to LD1 standard if required
- 15 Water supply, waste pipes
- We will ensure that:
- 15.1 stopcocks and valves are free and in working order and we label main shut-off valve in property.
 - 15.2 taps are free and not dripping.
 - 15.3 During severe cold spells (typically start November to end March but dependent on weather conditions outwith these dates), we assess whether stopcocks should be shut off and the water supply drained down and traps filled with anti-freeze solution.
 - 15.4 we replace any plugs that have been fitted to drainage systems for domestic appliances, e.g. dish washing machines. (or cap appropriately)
 - 15.5 immersion heaters, where fitted, are in working order and switches clearly labelled.
 - 15.6 cold water tanks have a fitted lid and insulation jacket and overflow pipes are supported (check inside of tank fit for purpose).
- 16 Insulation
- We will ensure that:
- 16.1 all hot water cylinders have a British Standard insulation jacket fitted, where they are not pre-lagged.
- 17 Ventilation, air vents
- We will ensure that:
- 17.1 mechanical extractor fans are clean and in working order where fitted.

18 Dampness

We will ensure that:

- 18.1 the property is free from damp due to water penetration or leaks
- 18.2 the property is free from evidence of significant condensation and new tenants will be advised of procedures to avoid condensation within their property especially if the property has been empty for a longer period of time.

19 Internal pass doors

We will ensure that:

- 19.1 all pass doors are intact, securely hung and operating properly.
- 19.2 bathroom and WC doors have a locking device operable where possible from the outside.
- 19.3 ironmongery is replaced if unserviceable.
- 19.4 Where an internal door has a glazing aperture we will ensure that safety glass is fitted.
- 19.5 pass doors are fitted with the correct level of fire resistance where applicable

20 Floors

We will ensure that:

- 20.1 floors are secure and free from any tripping hazard.
- 20.2 all loose and missing floorboards are re-secured or replaced, with no sign of active woodworm or rot.
- 20.3 all floors are de-nailed and carpet backing removed where applicable.
- 20.4 laminate flooring is removed in upper floor flats (and charged to the former tenant).
- 20.5 laminate flooring in other properties that is not up to our standards is removed (and charged to the former tenant).
- 20.5 non-slip flooring where provided is whole, clean & free of paint splashes.
- 20.6 floorboards are tested for excessive creaking and adjusted accordingly.
- 20.7 where thermoplastic tiles are used as a floor surface, any loose or crumbling tiles are replaced;

21 Stairs

We will ensure that:

- 21.1 stair treads & risers are secure and free from excessive creaking.
- 21.2 banisters and handrails are safe and secure.
- 21.3 there is no sign of active woodworm or rot.

22 Skirting, facings

We will ensure that:

- 22.1 missing or badly damaged skirtings' or facings are replaced or, if it is possible to repair them, that they are re-secured, filled where necessary and repainted.
- 22.2 skirtings' and facings are in sound condition.

23 Internal walls & ceilings

We will ensure that:

- 23.1 plasterwork is free from major defect and is suitable for decoration after reasonable preparation by the new tenant – with no loose plaster, a reasonably level surface and with no cracks greater than 3mm wide.
- 23.2 any large holes are filled in and left flush for decoration.
- 23.3 any polystyrene tiles are removed either on walls or ceilings and the plasterwork is made good and the area either redecorated or a decoration allowance is given to the new tenant.
- 23.4 surfaces that have a textured coating (Artex) are free from damage.
- 23.5 where surfaces have a textured coating in need of repair, this will be done as close to the original pattern as possible.
- 23.6 any loose or defective joint taping is replaced.

24 Bedroom wardrobes & cupboards

We will ensure that:

- 24.1 any fitted wardrobes and cupboards have at least one level shelf.
- 24.2 a clothes rail is fitted, where appropriate.

25 Kitchen units

We will ensure that:

- 25.1 all kitchen units are thoroughly checked, cleaned and fully functioning.
- 25.2 defective door hinges are repaired, replaced or adjusted where necessary.
- 25.3 damaged drawers and doors are repaired, or replaced with a matching drawer/door.
- 25.4 worktops damaged due to burning and/or water ingress are replaced where appropriate, and worktops are fully sealed and recharged to the former tenant where applicable.
- 25.5 kick plates & trims are in place.
- 25.6 wall cupboards are securely fixed.
- 25.7 washer/dryers, where provided, are clean and functioning.
- 25.8 the minimum space for kitchen appliances will be 620mm.
- 25.9 where a new kitchen is installed as part of void works wall units to have glass doors fitted

26 Showers

We will ensure that::

- 26.1 any instantaneous electric shower is included in the electrical safety check.
- 26.2 any shower is fully functioning.
- 26.3 the shower has a workable screen or shower rail and curtain.
- 26.4 tiling, grout, and/or waterproof panelling is sound and sealed to the bath and shower tray. Any gaps in the seal; will be repaired

27 Bathrooms

We will ensure that:

- 27.1 all sanitary ware, baths and basins are checked and are clean, free from rust, securely fixed, with all plugs in place, and free from any chips or cracks.
- 27.2 taps are operating easily and not dripping.

- 27.3 where replacement of part of a coloured suite is required, if the matching colour is not available the item is fully replaced in white.
- 27.4 flushing mechanisms are working satisfactorily and PVC cisterns are replaced, if required.
- 27.5 all existing tiling is sound and sealed.
- 27.6 all joints to baths and shower trays are sound and in good condition.
- 27.7 grab rails, toilet roll holders, cabinets & other fixtures and fittings are securely installed where fitted.
- 27.8 boxing-in under wash-hand basins etc. is checked, and if in poor condition is removed and the area made good.
- 27.9 toilet seats will always be replaced.
- 27.10 we will ensure that light fitting/s in the bathroom are IP65 certified
- 27.11 we will replace baths less than 1700mm length with low or level access shower trays.
- 27.12 we will consider shower tray size dependant on area available – but aim to achieve more than the standard 750 x 750mm size. We will fit safety glass screens with a folding door system, including wet wall panels.

28.0 Alarm Systems

We will ensure that all pull cords and PIR sensors are checked and in working order

29.0 Energy Performance Certificates

An Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) will be displayed in a prominent place within the property.. The EPC rating must be available for the property advert.

Decoration

In Sheltered, Retirement and Alarmed properties we will decorate. This includes all walls and woodwork. Where decoration is carried out the colours will be neutral and consistent throughout the property.

Decoration Voucher Scheme

This part of the policy sets out the circumstances where VHA will issue decoration allowances.

Aims and Objectives:

The overall aim of the Decoration Scheme is to assist tenants with the cost of decorating their home and in doing so assist in the efficient and effective maintenance of the Associations housing stock.

Decoration allowances are intended as a contribution towards the cost of materials and equipment needed to carry out internal redecoration work.

The allowances are not intended to meet the full costs involved.

They are intended to allow tenants choice in the decoration of their home.

The award of a decoration allowance does not remove the need for tenants to adequately insure the contents of their home from damage.

The award of a decoration allowance does not remove the need for persons carrying out work on behalf of the Association to take adequate care to ensure that damage does not occur.

The specific objectives of the Decoration Scheme are to:-

- Give clear guidance on when a decoration allowance will and will not be paid, how much will be paid and in what form.
- Publicise the terms of the scheme to enable a wider understanding by tenants, staff and the public.
- Identify the checks that we will use.
- Give clear guidance on how disputes will be dealt with.

Definition of a Decoration Allowance:

A decoration allowance can be payment in vouchers given to assist both new and existing tenants:

- When a new tenant moves into a property where the standard of decoration is below a reasonable standard as defined by the Association's Lettable Standard; or

- Following work that has been carried out by the Association or by a contractor working on our behalf that has caused excessive damage to the interior decoration of the property.
- To change the interior decoration of a property because the decoration is a dark or strong colour that would prove costly to change, for example black/purple.

A decoration allowance will not be awarded:

- To deal with obvious damage or neglect that has been caused by an existing tenant as this will be dealt with under our Rechargeable Repair Policy;
- To change the interior decoration of a property because it is not the incoming tenants' personal taste.
- To act as payment after an incident a tenant should have been insured for.
- Where a new tenancy is as a result of a mutual exchange.
- Where the Association or its contractor has completed decoration.

Decoration Allowance - New Tenancy:

It will be at the discretion of our staff while carrying out a void inspection of a property, to determine whether or not the property warrants a decoration allowance

An allowance may be awarded where:

- The wallpaper is considerably torn; or
- The walls or ceilings are badly marked or smoke stained; or
- The walls or ceilings have been cleaned but continue to look dirty; or
- The walls or ceilings have been painted with a dark or strong colour which is not easily covered up.
- The woodwork has been badly chipped /poorly painted where extensive work is required to correct, for example, the paint is peeling off the woodwork or has been painted a dark or strong colour which is not easily covered up.

The above list shows examples only and is not an exhaustive list of circumstances where a decoration allowance may be awarded

We will endeavour to advise as early as possible how much decoration allowance is to be awarded. Prospective tenants will be advised how much decoration allowance they would be entitled to prior to sign up of the property.

New tenants will be given any decoration allowance when they sign their tenancy agreement.

There will be circumstances where decoration will be completed by VHA during the void period e.g. sheltered housing; supported housing; properties where the potential tenant is older and has no family to assist; properties where major works have been completed.

Decoration Allowance- Following Repair Work:

We may award a decoration allowance following repair work carried out by the Association where the interior decoration has been damaged.

Where the damage is as a result of neglect by our employee or our contractor then this matter will be dealt with on an individual basis through the Complaints Procedure.

Once the repair work has been completed and we have been informed of any damage to the decoration then we will carry out an inspection to assess decoration allowance entitlement.

Decoration Allowance-Rates:

The amount of allowance a property is eligible for will depend on the size/number of rooms that need to be decorated and will be calculated on a room by room basis.

The table below shows the average rate per room and will be used as guidance when identifying the amount of decoration allowance up to a maximum of £500.00 per property.

Decoration Allowance Per Room	
Kitchen	£50
Bathroom	£50
Hall(no stair/landing)	£40
Hall (plus stair/landing)	£60

Living Room	£75
Single Bedroom	£50
Double Bedroom	£60

Issuing Decoration Allowance:

All decoration allowances will be issued in the form of vouchers

Decoration allowances awarded to tenants can be collected in person by the tenant(s) or posted out (with prior arrangement). Before the tenant is given the allowance he/she will be asked to provide proof of his/her identity if not known to the member of staff issuing the voucher(s).

Using Decoration Allowances:

Where the cost of the tenants' chosen materials exceeds the amount of their decoration allowance, he/she will be expected to make up the difference.

No credit notes will be given where a tenant fails to use the full monetary value of the voucher(s).

Decoration Vouchers cannot be exchanged for cash.

Follow Up Inspection:

We may wish to inspect the property to confirm that the decoration allowance has been spent appropriately. The inspection should coincide with the tenants' settling in visit.

Staff also have at their discretion the option to issue decoration vouchers on a room by room basis if several rooms have been identified for a decoration voucher e.g. when one room completed to a satisfactory standard then the next one is issued. This would be applicable in all vouchers above £300.00.

If at an inspection the decoration of the property is unchanged or the tenant is unable to demonstrate that they have purchased decoration materials, either through the presence

of the materials themselves, or the Voucher becomes time expired no further voucher will be issued and it is then the responsibility of the Tenant(s) to decorate.

Lost or Stolen Vouchers:

Once issued to the tenant, decoration allowances become the tenant' s responsibility.

Lost, damaged, defaced or time expired vouchers will only be replaced in very exceptional circumstances at the discretion of a staff member, following appropriate enquiries.