

THREE BOROUGHES HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

Void Policy, Procedure and Standards

1. Introduction

Three Boroughs Housing Co-operative aims to re-let its homes as quickly as possible to households which best match the empty property. The Co-operative also wants to provide properties which are clean, safe, secure and in good repair. This document outlines the aims and principles of void management, the steps the Co-operative will take when letting empty properties and the minimum standards Members can expect when they move into their new home.

2. Definition of a Void

Voids are properties which are empty because a tenancy has ended and a new tenancy has not yet started. Voids may arise due to a formal termination of the tenancy, a Member transferring to another tenancy, or following an eviction or death of a Member. The longer a property is empty, the higher the loss in income to the Co-operative, as rent is not charged on a void property.

3. Aims of the Policy

- To minimise the loss of rental income by letting empty properties as quickly as possible.
- To ensure properties are brought up to a consistent and acceptable standard before re-letting.
- To let every property to a household which is the best match for the property, especially in cases where the property has been adapted for a disabled person.
- To ensure Members are happy with the standard of their new home.

3. General Approaches to Void Management

3.1 Tenancy Sustainment

To avoid unnecessary voids, Members will be supported with financial advice (relating to debts, benefits or budgeting), or by signposting to other support agencies. An eviction will only take place in cases where all alternative options have been exhausted. Tenancies may also be sustained by carrying out adaptations to a property so a Member can remain in their home.

3.2 Internal Transfers

A transfer will only be permitted following a satisfactory inspection of the Member's current property to ensure it is in a good condition and state of repair.

3.2 Death of a Member

The Co-operative will engage in a sensitive discussion with the relatives of the Member to outline the requirements in relation to ending the tenancy, clearing the property and returning the keys.

4. Void Procedure for self-contained properties

4.1 Termination of tenancy

Members will be reminded of their responsibilities regarding ending their tenancy as part of their induction and as outlined in their tenancy agreement. Members must:

- Give the required 28 days' notice period.
- Remove all belongings from the property and leave it in a good condition.
- Return the keys by 12.00 noon on the agreed vacation date. It will be made clear in the Tenancy Termination letter that rent will continue to be charged on the property until the keys are returned.

4.2 Property Inspection prior to end of tenancy

During the notice period, the Co-operative Housing Manager will organise a property inspection. The condition of the property will be recorded on the Property Inspection form and the Member asked to rectify any faults or undertake repairs that are their responsibility.

4.3 Property Inspections following vacation

A full inspection of the property will take place on the date the property is vacated by the Co-operative Housing Manager or an appointed contractor.

- Information and costs relating to any recharges will be sent in writing to the outgoing Member.
- The Co-operative Housing Manager will arrange for any void works required to be carried out to a clearly specified timescale agreed with the void contractors, to include a gas and electrical inspection and an EPC survey (if required). Meter readings will be taken.
- Minor repair works, that are not urgent or disruptive, may be arranged for a time after the incoming Member has moved in.
- A final inspection will take place by the Co-operative Housing Manager once the void contractor has confirmed all works have been completed. Meter readings will be taken.

4.4 Allocation of the Empty Property

- Steps to identify prospective tenants for the property will commence as soon as it is known a property will become void (please refer to the Allocations Policy for details).
- Formal notification of the offer will be made in writing to the prospective new or transferring Member.
- An accompanied viewing of the property will be arranged with the incoming tenant. Where possible, with the prior written agreement of the outgoing Member, viewings may take place within the 28-day notice period. Viewings will only take place in an empty property if it is in a suitable condition to be viewed safely.
- The new or transferring Member will be asked to confirm their acceptance of the tenancy no more than three calendar days after the viewing takes place, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

- The Member will be advised of a prospective start date for their new tenancy.
- As soon as the void works are complete and a tenancy start date can be confirmed, a sign-up will be arranged for the new Member to sign the tenancy. They will be advised that rent will be charged from the tenancy start date.
- New Members will be given all the required information, documentation and advice to allow them to move into the property promptly. This may include assistance in setting up utilities, such as gas and electricity.

5. Void Procedure for shared properties

5.1 Termination of Tenancy/Licence

Members will be reminded of their responsibilities regarding giving up their tenancy/licence as part of their induction and as outlined in their tenancy/licence agreement. Members must:

- Give the required 28 days' notice period.
- Remove all their belongings from the property and leave their room and any furnishings, fixtures and fittings supplied by the Co-operative in a clean and good condition.
- Return the keys by 12 noon on the day the tenancy/licence ends. It will be made clear in the Tenancy/Licence Termination Letter that Members will be responsible for any additional rent or daily charge until the keys have been returned.

5.2 Property Inspection following vacation

- Feedback will be sought from the co-sharer/s in relation to how the property has been left.
- Information and costs relating to any recharges will be sent in writing to the outgoing Member.

5.3 Allocation of the shared property

- Steps to identify prospective Members will commence as soon as it is known a property will become void (please refer to the Allocations Policy for details).
- The household is responsible for advising the Co-operative Housing Manager and New Members Committee once a new co-sharer is identified.
- The new Member will be advised of the start date of their tenancy/licence and that the weekly rent or licence charge will commence from that date.
- New Members will be given all the required information, documentation and advice to allow them to move into the property promptly on the agreed start date.

6. Empty property standards

The table below sets out the standards Members can expect when they move into their new home. The Co-operative will make every effort to ensure these standards are met.

AIM / ITEM / LOCATION	WHAT WE WILL DO
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Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove any belongings and rubbish left by the previous Member • Clean the property and ensure it is pest free
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test all gas installations to make sure they are safe and in good working order • Check the wiring and electrical installations to make sure they are safe and repair any faults • Provide a copy of the gas certificate, electrical certificate and energy performance certificate • Check or replace any faulty fire-resistant doors and fit them with door closures. Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working • Ensure child safety catches are fitted to all windows above the ground floor • Make sure handrails and banisters are present and securely fixed • Check all glazing is intact and re-glaze where necessary
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check all doors and windows fit well and open and close properly • Check all external doors and windows can be locked securely and two sets of keys are provided for external doors
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there is a suitable heating system in the main living areas (kitchen, bathroom, living room and bedrooms) and an adequate supply of electrical sockets • Ensure any extractor fans are clean and in good working order
Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the sink/taps are in good working order • Ensure there is storage space and a work surface • Provide either an electric cooker panel or a gas cooker connection • Provide space for a cooker, fridge and washing machine (where possible)
Bathroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there is a bath or shower, a wash hand basin and toilet in good working condition, clean and free of limescale • Ensure bathroom and toilet doors are lockable (with turnable locks accessible from the outside)
Wall tiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace missing or cracked wall tiles to match existing ones as closely as possible • Ensure all mastic seals are watertight
Flooring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace any missing or damaged floor tiles in a colour or style to match existing as closely as possible

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure any loose floorboards and replace any damaged ones • Where necessary, replace the entire floor covering in the kitchen or bathroom with slip resistant covering • Carpets or laminate may be removed by the previous Member or we may remove them due to the condition they are in. Agreement will be sought with the new Member whether to remove or maintain the existing flooring. The decision will be recorded in writing.
Plumbing & Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all stopcocks/stop taps are in good working order • Inspect all pipework for leaks • Check and clear any blockages in sinks, basins and waste pipes • Insulate all hot water cylinders
Decorating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note all signs of structural damage or movement and take action if necessary • Rake and fill or re-plaster areas of badly blown or cracked plaster • Remove all polystyrene tiles and make good the affected areas • Remove all exposed nails and wall plugs, fill holes and rub down surfaces to a smooth finish • Trace and stop all sources of water penetration and rising damp • Treat for mould if present
White goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If provided, will be tested and repaired as necessary
Outside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill any holes or gaps in brickwork • Check all guttering, downpipes and drains for leaks and blockages • Ensure any bin stores are in a safe and useable condition
Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear the garden of any rubbish • Cut back overgrown vegetation • Remove any diseased trees • Ensure all paths and paving are sound and free from trip hazards • Leave boundary walls, fencing and gates in a safe condition

6. Annual Monitoring and Reporting

The number of voids, the average time to re-let a property and the rental income lost due to void periods will be monitored and the information included in the Co-operative's Annual Report.

7. Policy Review

This policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects best practice and to address legislative, regulatory or operational changes.

Approved by the Management Committee on	5th May 2022
Signed	
Position of Signatory	
For review on	5th May 2027