



Voids Policy

Voids Policy

Who's this for?	The Honeycomb Group – Staffs Housing; Concrete; Glow
Version control	Final V.1 To be implemented March 2025
Consultation with stakeholders –	Property Team; Repairs Focus Group, Executive Team
Equality impact assessment date	10 Nov 24
Data Protection Assessment date	27 Feb 25
Date created	January 2025
Last revised/updated	New policy
Review required	5 years from approval date
Owner (Executive Lead)	Executive Director of Operations
Approved by	Executive Team 13.3.25
Approved by Customer Services Committee	6.3.25

Document Revision History

Version	Date	Description of Change	Author

Introduction & Purpose

The Void Policy sets out The Honeycomb Group commitment to how it will effectively manage empty homes within its stock in order to achieve value for money and make best use of its homes.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set out the principles and service standards of the void management service
- Help to meet local housing need by maximising availability of social housing.
- To manage void properties following the Honeycomb Group Voids tier system:
 - Lean – Completed in house where possible (low value / quick turnaround)
 - Standard – Completed with main voids contractor (average SOR / average turnaround)
 - Major – Completed as quoted works and project managed (higher cost / long term void)

Policy Aims and Objectives

The key objectives of this policy are to:

- Minimise the length of time that a property is empty, the amount of rental income lost, and costs incurred
- Ensure that properties are let in a clean and safe condition that meets the Lettable standard
- Meet customers' needs and maximises their satisfaction.
- Provide a value for money service
- Make best use of the void period to meet the Honeycomb Group investment requirements
- Meet the Honeycomb Group statutory, regulatory and compliance requirements.
- Void management includes the following activities:
 - Tenancy termination
 - Inspections
 - Viewings and offers
 - Work to void properties
 - Creating tenancies
 - Management of long-term voids
 - Management of low demand properties.

This policy aims to ensure that a property is properly managed when it becomes vacant, that it is brought up to the Honeycomb Group “lettable” standard before a new tenant moves in, and that the rent loss is minimised within the whole process. This policy is in line with the Honeycomb Group Allocations Policy to ensure the most effective use of the housing stock in order to help meet housing need in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

The policy will ensure that a forward thinking and strategic approach is adopted to void management by:

- Ensuring that outgoing tenants are aware of their responsibilities prior to leaving the property in order to keep repair costs to a minimum
- Ensuring that tenants who are found to have wilfully damaged property are recharged for repairs
- Reducing rent loss by minimising the length of time during which properties are being repaired
- Ensuring properties are available as quickly as possible for people in housing need
- Undertaking works to voids which are appropriate to the customer needs • Minimising any costs associated with tenant transfers.

Regulatory Standards, Legislation, and Approved Codes of Practice

- i. Social Housing Regulation Act 2023
- ii. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- iii. The Building Safety Act 2023
- iv. Homes fit for human habitation Act 2018
- v. Awwabs Law 2023
- vi. Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015
- vii. Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- viii. UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- ix. Data Protection Act 2018
- x. HHSRS - Housing Health and Safety Rating System

Procedural steps for processing voids :

Pre-Termination Visits

Once written notice ending the tenancy has been received, a pre-termination visit will be undertaken by the Void Specialist as soon as practicable. This visit will determine the condition of the property and highlight any repairs that the tenant will be required to undertake before leaving the property, and where applicable, explain that Honeycomb Group reserves the right to recharge the outgoing tenant for any damages caused to the property, due to neglect or arising out of unauthorised alterations to the property. This visit will seek to establish the reason why the tenant/s is/are leaving and identify whether any support/solutions are available to help them to remain (if applicable).

At this stage if the tenant has undertaken their own improvements, where permission has not been authorised, the inspecting officer will look for damage to the property. If the outgoing tenant is advised that they need to remove the improvement works, they are liable for all costs associated with returning the property to the original state.

If the tenant is transferring to another Honeycomb Group property a pre-transfer visit will be carried out by the Neighbourhood Team. If the works

are not completed during this visit the offer of a transfer may withdraw or they may be charged for the works to be undertaken on their behalf.

Where improvement work has been carried out to the property the outgoing tenant may request compensation to cover part of the costs.

Void Inspection

A void inspection will be undertaken on all void properties as soon as possible after the tenant leaves. Once the required repair work has been identified as per the void standard an approximate completion date of the property will be determined.

The purpose of this inspection will be to:

- Ensure the property is empty, and to remove any items that pose a risk to the health and safety of prospective tenant(s) or contractors
- Determine whether prospective tenants can be allowed to view the property
- Ensure the property is secure and change the front and back door locks (not required on suited locks)
- Identify any outstanding disrepair which may be the responsibility of the previous tenant
- Arrange for electrical appliances and installations to be checked
- Arrange for a gas safety check and cap off
- Identify if the property requires a pre-clean or other works before the prospective tenants can view
- Identify works needed to comply with health and safety requirements
- Identify necessary repairs which are required to enable a property to be relet as soon as possible
- Apply a risk-based approach to determine the appropriate level of security (if required)

Terminations Following the Death of the Tenant

Where the tenant dies, the tenancy still needs to be terminated by the next of kin. This can be done by contacting the Honeycomb Group and filling in a termination form. The tenancy will not be terminated until the death certificate is received. NOK will be advised to clear the property and return the keys as soon as possible as rent will be charged until the keys are returned.

In the instances where the tenancy has been ended due to the death of the sole tenant the person who has been properly authorised to deal with the late tenant's estate is responsible for the removal of all goods from the property. Where there is no person properly authorised to deal with the deceased tenant's estate, then the Honeycomb Group will commence the formal legal process to end the tenancy by the service of a Notice to Quit on the Public Trustee. Once this Notice has expired, any goods remaining in the property will be disposed of following the procedure set out in Section 41 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 which is discussed below in this policy.

The property will still be subject to a pre and post termination visit. If damage to the property has occurred owing to the wilful neglect of the deceased tenant or the carrying out of unauthorised alterations by the deceased tenant, then the Honeycomb Group may consider pursuing the estate for the costs of making good any damages caused by the deceased tenant during the tenancy.

Evictions and Abandonments

The outgoing tenant is responsible for removing all personal possessions from the property by the end of the written notice period. However, there may be some instances where the tenant fails to give notice (either as a result of eviction or abandonment) and belongings are left in the property or where notice has been given but belongings are still left within the property. Once the notice period has expired and the tenant has left the property, The Honeycomb Group accepts no responsibility for any items left within the property or the land forming part of the tenancy. In such circumstances The Honeycomb Group reserves the right to issue a formal Notice in accordance with section 41 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 advising there are personal belongings within the property and that upon expiry of the notice any belongings remaining will become the property of the Honeycomb Group and will be dealt with in accordance with section 41. Agreed details relating to the storage and removal of personal belongings which have been left in a property are contained in the Tenancy and Estate Policy and the Section 41 procedure.

Recharges

The Honeycomb Group will seek to recover from the outgoing tenant any compensatory damages to the property arising because of wilful neglect on the part of the tenant and/or any other compensatory damages to the property occurring because of any unauthorised alterations the property.

Letting a Void Property

The Honeycomb Group aims to ensure that allocations are made giving full consideration of the customer needs, the property and any issues in the local area.

Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the Honeycomb Group Allocations Policy. All tenants will have been assessed in accordance with the allocations policy. All applicants must meet the policy eligibility criteria (Allocations Policy – section)

Selection of New Tenant(s)

To ensure that void rent loss is kept to a minimum, the process of selecting a new tenant for a property will begin as soon as possible after notice is received from the outgoing tenant or the Neighbourhood Team is made aware that the property will be available for re-letting. Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the Honeycomb Groups Allocations Policy.

Viewings and Offers

Once a suitable applicant has been identified they will be invited to attend a viewing at the property. The viewing is intended to ensure that the property is suitable, requests for additional works will be considered in line with the Honeycomb Group Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

Prospective tenants may be given the choice to keep window and floor coverings that have been left in the property by the former tenant. If the outgoing tenant has left gas or electric appliances in the property, the Honeycomb Group cannot take responsibility for maintaining these and they will therefore be removed.

Prospective tenants will be advised of the date and informed in advance if this date is unlikely to be achieved, for example if additional works are identified during completing the repairs. Tenants/prospective tenants will not be given access to the property for any reason once contractor has begun works, due to health and safety reasons, or pre-arranged via the Void Specialist.

New Tenancies

As soon as all essential repairs are completed satisfactorily, the prospective tenant will be invited to sign the Tenancy Agreement.

The new tenant will also be provided with appropriate advice about:

- Paying their rent.
- Applying for benefits, if required.
- Setting up utilities.
- Reporting any repairs.
- Fire safety
- Solar panels (where applicable).

Works to Void Properties

All properties will meet the Honeycomb Void standard and Decent Homes Standard. Prior to any works being undertaken the Honeycomb Group will ensure that there is an up-to-date asbestos survey for the property. Providing the property meets the standard, in some instances, works to the property may be undertaken after the tenant has signed up, specifically where the works can be completed without significant disruption for the tenant, the works will not pose a significant health and safety risk to the tenant or member of their household and the tenant agrees to the works being undertaken on tenancy. External works to the property will, in the main, be undertaken after the new tenancy has started. The Honeycomb Group may also delay the completion of some works if the property is known to be included on a planned programme in the near future. Where a property requires an element of decoration, the contractor, may deliver a painting pack directly to the incoming tenant which enables the work to be completed by the tenant without a financial cost for materials to the tenant.

Utilities and Services

When a property has become void the Honeycomb Group will cap the gas supply in order to reduce any health and safety risks. Wherever possible the supplies will also be transferred to a preferred supplier in order to reduce any delays in managing the void process. During the health and safety checks the electric and gas meters at the property will be checked. Any evidence of tampering will be recorded.

The gas supply will not be uncapped until the tenant confirms that they have moved into the property, to ensure that any risks of gas build up are minimised. The Honeycomb Group aims to ensure that the gas is uncapped as soon as possible following the request of the customer. When the gas is uncapped the tenant will also be provided with the annual Gas Safety Certificate.

Major/Long Term Voids

Where a void property requires major works, and therefore a high level of investment is needed in order to bring it up to an appropriate standard, then an options appraisal may be undertaken in order to assess whether the works should be completed, or if the property should be taken out of use. Consideration will be given to the overall cost of the works required.

If the assessment finds that the works are financially viable, they will be completed. For properties where the assessment finds that it is not financially viable to undertake the works and there is little demand for the property type and/or area, the property may be disposed of in line with our Asset Management Strategy for properties that have reached the end of their natural lifecycle.

Low Demand Properties

The priority for the Honeycomb Group is to ensure that all homes are let as soon as possible to tenants who are able to sustain the tenancy. A property will be low demand if there are no suitable applicants.

Adapted Properties

Properties which are adapted when they become void will be considered in line with the Honeycomb Group Adaptations Policy with the priority being to ensure best use of the adaptations.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

- The Board has overall governance responsibility for ensuring this policy is fully implemented to ensure full compliance with legislation and regulatory standards.
- For assurance that this policy is operating effectively in practice, the Board will receive regular updates on its implementation and performance.

- The Executive Director of Operations has strategic responsibility for the management of Repairs and Maintenance which includes voids management and ensuring compliance is achieved and maintained. They will oversee the implementation of this policy.
- The Head of Property, with support from the Voids Specialist and the Asset and Contracts Manager, has operational responsibility for the management of Voids.
- Neighbourhoods Teams will provide support and assistance where required and facilitate any legal or other processes, as necessary.

Statement of Intent

We acknowledge and accept our responsibilities to ensure a robust Voids policy is in place.

We will carry out all repairs as required in line with our Voids Standard.

We will ensure that there is a robust process in place for the management of immediately dangerous situations identified through the voids process.

Performance monitoring & compliance

The Honeycomb Group is committed to ensuring that its voids repairs and maintenance services are delivered to a high standard and provide high levels of customer satisfaction. In order to help it do this, it will monitor and manage performance through a range of methods.

The Honeycomb Group will measure and evaluate performance against a range of appropriate and relevant performance indicators and will benchmark itself against other social housing providers.

The Honeycomb Group may audit the quality of voids works and investigate complaints in relation to the standard of works and will actively collect and analyse tenants' views on the repairs service provided, with feedback collected by staff acting independently of the delivery of the service. Performance information and benchmarking data will be reported to the council, contractor/s, Board and customers through the Annual Report and Customer Engagement framework. This will ensure acceptable progress and performance is being achieved.

We will report on:

- Total number of voids processed in all tiers and target completion times
- TSMs
- Current Position
- Disposals from Void assessment

Staff Awareness

This policy will be available on The Hive for all Staff to access.

Data Protection

For processing, storing and sharing the personal data associated with this policy, we will ensure that it is carried out in accordance with current data protection legislation.

Review

This policy shall be reviewed every five years, and a review may be required earlier if there is a legislative or regulatory requirement or significant change.

Linked Policies & Procedures

- Data Protection Policy
- Decant Policy
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Estates & Ground Maintenance Policy
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
- Group Allocations Policy
- Adaptations Policy

Date

February 2025