

# **Ascham Homes Void Management Policy**

## **Contents**

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Board and resident scrutiny**
- 3 Legal and regulatory framework**
- 4 Performance and service improvement**
- 5 Service standards and the lettable standard**
- 6 Contractual arrangements**
- 7 Managing the outgoing tenant**
- 8 Rechargeable repairs**
- 9 Specifying repairs to empty homes**
- 10 The void turnaround target**
- 11 The quality and timeliness of repairs**
- 12 Choice based lettings**
- 13 Customer care**
- 14 Diversity**
- 15 Procurement of void management.**
- 16 Procedure notes**
- 17 Tenancy termination incentive scheme**
- 18 Review of this policy**

## **1 Introduction**

As with other London Boroughs, Waltham Forest Council faces an increasing demand for social housing from those in housing need including homeless applicants, and demand clearly outstrips supply. Ascham Homes will aim to ensure a year on year reduction in the number of empty council homes to a level that allows for movement within the stock and the ability to assist customers to access council housing and provide homes where people want to live.

It is Ascham Homes objective to turn round empty properties to minimise rent loss.

Void management is one of the core services provided by the company, because of this Ascham Homes will:

- monitor performance of the service closely
- manage staff and operatives effectively
- improve the service using customer feedback
- employ and develop knowledgeable, skilled and customer-focused staff
- provide staff with the tools that they need to deliver the service efficiently and effectively.

The purpose of the void management service is to:

- provide efficient, timely and cost effective repairs
- deliver excellent customer care
- deliver accessible services to diverse customer groups
- meet customer priorities and needs
- be open to learning from customers and complaints

## **2 Board and resident scrutiny**

Performance against targets on voids will be reported to each full Board meeting, each Performance and Development Committee meeting and to contract panels each quarter.

Performance and Development Committee will consider a detailed report on void management performance twice a year, this will include performance against performance indicators and commitments given on the Your New Home service standard.

## **3 Legal and regulatory framework**

Ascham Homes void management policy is based on the following contractual and statutory obligations: -

- London Borough of Waltham Forest Terms and Conditions of Tenancy May 2009
- Landlord & Tenant Act 1985
- Environmental Protection Act 1990,
- Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994,
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993

## **4 Performance and service improvement**

Performance measures for void management help the company to manage the timeliness and quality of repairs. To ensure that void management offers value for money and is continually improved Ascham Homes will monitor the:

- performance of contractors, Ascham Homes and LBWF in achieving targets
- expenditure on void management
- quality of the works carried out
- level of tenant satisfaction

Performance will be measured against appropriately-defined targets. These targets will be set annually by:

- reviewing the performance of the previous year
- benchmarking the performance of other ALMOs

- taking into account projected LBWF nomination rights to newbuilds and refurbishment schemes

The following measures will be used to manage void performance (updated as applicable in the coming years)

<b>Description</b>
Average time to relet
Average void cost
% of voids post inspected
Average number of days void with contractor
Average number of days void with AH
Customer satisfaction with their new home

Ascham Homes will benchmark cost and performance against peer organizations, and maintain contacts with peers so that it remains in the forefront of best practice. Ascham Homes aspires to performance that is in the top 25% of ALMO's.

Services will be delivered seamlessly so that there is no loss of time between vacation by the outgoing tenant, completion of works by the contractors, and letting to the new tenant. Clear timescales for procedures will be set and closely monitored.

The target timescale for the completion of work will be based on the scale of work, for example, ≤£1000 – 5 working days and ≤£2500 – 10 working days. (NB this is for illustrative purposes only).

Ascham Homes will seek continuous improvement in the voids service through:

- regular review of the void service standard by residents
- the Void Repairs contract
- 360 degree appraisal of staff and competency based job descriptions
- development of procedures to better manage processes
- mystery shopping void properties
- periodic reviews of long term voids

The definition of the key performance indicator for void management – the average time to relet council homes – will be based on the current HouseMark definition.

## **5 Service standards and the lettable standard**

The standards that new tenants can expect of their new home will be set out simply and clearly in the Your New Home service standard. This standard is also known as the lettable standard. The service standard will strike an appropriate balance between minimising expenditure and establishing reasonable standards for customers.

## **6 Contractual arrangements**

Routine voids will be processed by Ascham Homes and a private sector contractor. The contract will be monitored by Ascham Homes Empty Homes Team.

Voids which require major works will be processed by Ascham Homes Construction Team and a private sector contractor. The contract will be monitored jointly by LBWF and the Construction Team. An option appraisal model will be used to identify properties where capital resources should be utilized.

## **7 Managing the outgoing tenant**

Operations North and South Teams will ensure that outgoing tenants give the required notice of ending their tenancy, abandoned homes are dealt with promptly. The procedures and checks that outgoing tenants must carry out will be set out simply and clearly in the Leaving Your Home leaflet, this will be widely available and easily accessible to tenants. Ascham Homes will compensate outgoing tenants who have carried out (with their consent) eligible improvement works such as new kitchen units, bath or shower or double glazing.

## **8 Rechargeable repairs**

See the Repairs Policy for a full description of rechargeable repairs. Outgoing tenants will be charged the full cost of rechargeable repairs.

## **9 Specifying repairs to empty homes**

The Empty Properties Team will ensure prompt specification of works, identification of potential rechargeable repairs and handover to the contractor. Where the outgoing tenant has given notice a pre-termination inspection will be carried out to specify works to the empty home. Any aids or adaptations left behind by the vacating tenant will be recycled wherever possible.

## **10 The void turnround target**

The void turnround target applies to all void properties, unless more extensive, disruptive or specialist works are needed (for example rot treatment works, or removal of hazardous asbestos)

## **11 The quality and timeliness of repairs**

The contractors will carry out works to a specified standard, in a professional manner, right first time. Repair works to voids must be completed before the tenant moves in, the only exceptions will be a reasonable number of non-essential repairs. The contractors will ensure that Ascham Homes is kept closely informed of progress with repair works.

## **12 Choice based lettings**

LBWF Choice Based Lettings will offer the property to the prospective tenant promptly and indicate whether the tenancy to be offered is secure or introductory. Homes will be pre-allocated before they become empty, wherever possible. Viewings with works in progress will take place.

## **13 Customer care**

Prospective tenants will be given a written offer. Ascham Homes staff will accompany them on viewing their new home and conduct a sign up interview on the same day. The

interview is an opportunity to make clear tenants' rights and responsibilities and it should be conducted carefully and fully. All prospective tenants will be given the Your New Home Service Standard.

If rooms are in need of decorating, decoration vouchers will be given to new tenants. New tenants will be given a welcome pack containing guidance and information on a range of services relating to their new home and local area. All new tenants will be canvassed on their satisfaction with their new home.

Ascham Homes will visit new tenants within six weeks of moving in. The purpose of this visit is to make sure that they understand how everything in their new homes works and for them to ask any questions about their home, tenancy agreement, local area and services, and paying rent.

Services will be delivered seamlessly between Ascham Homes, LBWF and the contractor to reduce the level of avoidable contact with customers.

## **14 Diversity**

Ascham Homes will assess the equality impact of changes to the service and deliver new homes equally and fairly to all customer groups. Ascham Homes will monitor the delivery of new homes to diverse customer groups, and address any imbalances identified. The company will satisfy itself that the contractors' approach to diversity reflects industry best practice.

Ascham Homes will

- aim to deliver repairs services which do not discriminate on the grounds of ethnicity, age, gender, disability, faith and sexual orientation
- offer an enhanced service to tenants who may be less able to maintain their property
- use translation and interpretation aids and services to communicate effectively with customers

Contractors are expected to carry out minor domestic tasks for elders or people with a disability where it is necessary to complete a repair e.g. moving furniture or re-hanging curtains.

## **15 Procurement of void management.**

The procurement of the void management service will be in accordance with the Ascham Homes Procurement Strategy and Procurement Procedures and will:

- meet users' needs
- deliver long term value for money
- maximise social and economic benefits, and
- minimise damage to the environment and health.

Residents will have a full say in setting the standards to be delivered by the contracts. Individual residents will be invited to participate in the contract preparation and tendering process. Area priorities will be set in consultation with residents through Contract Panels.

The terms of the void repairs contract will include provisions for joint performance targets, regular dialogue, joint communications, joint training, and joint action planning

## **16 Procedure notes**

Ascham Homes will produce comprehensive procedure notes covering handling of all aspects of void property management and all types of voids including:

- formal termination, the tenant is required to give 28 days written notice, in compliance with their tenancy agreement, of their intention to leave the property
- death of tenant, where Ascham Homes is notified of the death of a tenant and there is no successor
- abandonment, where Ascham Homes issues a legal notice to a tenant who has vacated the property without notice
- eviction, where Ascham Homes completes court action to evict a tenant
- transfers, where the tenant is re-housed through the Choice Based Lettings scheme, or other transfer scheme
- development voids, where a new property is created by Ascham Homes, for example conversion schemes
- decants, where a tenant has to be moved, usually temporarily, from their home for the purposes of refurbishment or as a result of the property becoming uninhabitable, e.g. fire, flood.

## **17 Tenancy Termination Incentive Scheme**

Ascham Homes will offer a payment to tenants who give four weeks notice when vacating a property. To qualify, they must remove all belongings and leave the property empty, clean and in good condition. To get the payment tenants would also be expected to have no rent arrears, return all keys, allow viewings to be held whilst they are still residing where requested, and give vacant possession of the property.

Payments will be split into two parts of £100 and/or £150 so that tenants who cannot meet the survey and viewings requirement criteria, still have an incentive to leave the property in a good condition.

A payment of up to £250 will be sent out to tenants if they meet the conditions.

## **18 Review of this policy**

This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless amendment is prompted by a change in legislation, operational requirements or customer feedback. The Policy will be reviewed in consultation with tenants and staff. This policy was issued in October 2009.