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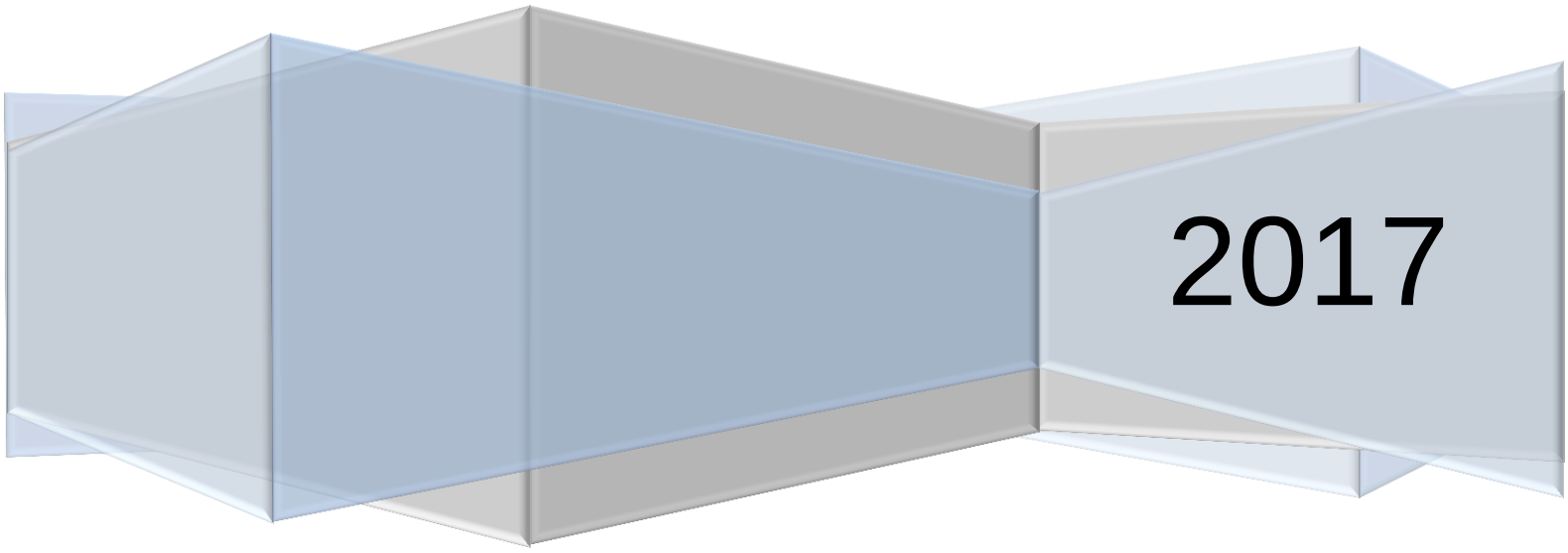
OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

Void Service Agreement

Housing and Property & Direct Services



Void Service Agreement

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Version Control:

Version	Date	Description of Changes
V 1.0	May 2017	
V 1.1	September 2017	Minor clarifications and typos

1. Introduction

This document sets out the roles and responsibilities of the teams involved in the management of Council housing stock becoming void and arrangements to ensure that the properties are re-let in the minimum amount of time. The teams involved are:

- Tenancy Management (Housing & Property)
- Allocations (Housing & Property)
- Building, Design & Facilities (Housing & Property)
- Responsive Building Operations (Direct Services)

2. Job Titles & Acronyms

STMO	**Senior Tenancy Management Officer**
TMM	**Tenancy Management Manager**
TMO	**Tenancy Management Officer**
VTL	**Void Team Leader**

3. Termination of Tenancies

There are several reasons for tenancies to be terminated, including:

- Death
- Moving to Residential Care
- Transfer to another Council property
- Nomination to a Housing Association
- Moving out of social housing sector
- Eviction
- Abandonment

There are several methods to end a tenancy in law:

- A tenant's 28 day Notice to Quit
- A landlord's 28 day Notice to Quit (and possibly a Possession Order)
- The execution of a Warrant for Possession by the Court Bailiff (Eviction)
- A surrender of the tenancy, agreed by both parties, ideally by way of a Deed

The TMO will ensure that the correct method of ending the tenancy is used, depending on the circumstance of the case. The 28 days' notice cannot lawfully be shortened however the decision whether to waive any rental charges during this period, such as if the keys are returned early, is at the discretion of the TMM or STMO.

4. Transfer Applicants

Tenants on the transfer list who are likely to be successful in bidding for a transfer will be visited by a TMO in advance. The Allocations Team will run regular reports to identify the tenants to be visited.

The purpose of the visit is to assess the condition of the property including the decorative condition as well as to prepare the tenant and speed up void turnaround times if possible. Where decoration is required, the tenant will be advised of the decoration work required. Any day to day repairs that are noted will be reported to Direct Services.

If the condition of the property is particularly poor, Notice of Seeking Possession may be served and the tenant will not be considered for any offers until the property condition has improved to a satisfactory standard.

5. Pre-termination Inspection

When a notice is received, every effort should be made to arrange a pre-termination inspection although sensitivities with bereaved relatives regarding the death of a tenant may make this difficult. The inspection will be carried out by a VTL.

Topics to be covered at the inspection visit include:

- Identification of any outstanding repair or decoration
- Identification of a tenant's potential recharge liability
- Early assessment of potential void work volumes

A Pre-Termination sheet will be completed at each visit and the record kept on the property file. If a VTL identifies that the condition of the property may not be suitable to be advertised or visited by prospective tenants before becoming void, they will inform the TMO.

For all properties becoming void, a record will be kept of whether a Pre-termination Inspection was carried out or not, and if not, what the reason was. This information will be part of the required management information and the percentage of inspections carried out as a proportion of properties becoming void will be recorded monthly on the Council's performance management system,.

If it is not possible to organise a visit, the TMO will make every effort to confirm with the outgoing tenant/relative, how many rooms there are, whether there are any disabled adaptations and whether there are any known major problems with the property. The TMO will also discuss with the tenant whether the property will be advertised and if they should expect potential visits to be made by prospective tenants.

6. Advertising Properties

Wherever possible, properties should be advertised as soon as notification of the forthcoming void is received. If photographs of a property are available, they should accompany the advert. Stock photos (e.g. sheltered blocks, property type) can be used if necessary.

7. Choice Based Lettings System

Oxford City Council works in partnership with other Registered Providers that own social housing stock in Oxford. This partnership is known as ORAH (Oxford Register for Affordable Housing). As the lead partner, the Council operates the city wide Choice Based Lettings Scheme for all partners, advertising properties and approving allocations and nominations to successful bidders. The Choice Based Lettings cycle is weekly.

Under the terms of the ORAH partnership, the City Council has a series of agreed targets for turning around offers, with properties that are immediately ready to let or expected to be ready within seven days having a turnaround target two working days for family accommodation and three working days for single person accommodation.

As the City Council is now advertising and allocating properties often before a tenancy ends, offers are being prioritised based on the expected void ready date.

8. Offer Approvals

When a bidding cycle closes, Allocations staff check those who are top of the bidding list for a property to ensure that:

- Properties are allocated to applicants in the most housing need
- An applicant is offered a property if they are considered suitable to sustain a tenancy
- The property offered is suitable for the applicant and their household's housing need

9. Accompanied viewing/letter of introduction

Accompanied viewings or viewings with a letter of introduction should be used to give potential tenants the opportunity to look round the property and make an early decision. These will have been discussed with the outgoing tenant or family of deceased where possible.

10. Return of Keys

Where keys are to be returned by outgoing tenants/relatives, they should be received by 12 midday on a Monday. If keys are received after this time, the full week's rent will be payable by the outgoing tenant and the property will not become void until the following Monday.

Each week, a report is generated showing properties where the keys are expected. Keys are returned by outgoing tenants to the Contact Centre. Customer Services Officers are required to immediately e-mail the Tenancy Management team (generic e-mail address) and the Voids Team when a set of keys is returned. A key receipt is provided to the tenant/family and a record of who accepted the keys is noted. If keys are returned when they are not expected, i.e. if there is not a current valid notice, the Contact Centre staff will immediately contact the TMO.

11. Key Safes

Keys are required to be collected by a member of the voids team no later than 24 hours after they have been received. A record of which member of staff collected the keys is kept. Each new void property is then visited and a key safe fitted. The key safe code is notified to all staff and contractors who need access to the property whilst void. Once a new tenant has been signed up, the key safe is removed.

12. Void Works

The VTL will inspect the property as soon as possible after the keys are returned. The VTL will notify the TMO about any adaptations if not already identified. The VTL will identify and order all works to bring the property up to the Void Standard.

These will include:

- Clearance of property and garden
- Clearance and lock changes of any sheds, garages or out-houses
- Rough cut of gardens and remove all temporary sheds, greenhouses and ponds (unless gifted to the incoming tenant)
- Insulation to loft space
- Gas and electric safety checks, ensuring there are usable utility supplies
- Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty
- Capital/major works only if the property could not be let otherwise
- Add capital/major works to the planned program where needed
- Complete or program all works that will be recharged to the previous tenant
- Plan/appoint all external planned works to be completed post void
- Plan/appoint all non-essential or minor repairs that could be completed once the new tenant has moved into the property or prior to the outgoing tenant moving out.
- Provide two complete sets of keys for the property including fobs, shed keys, balcony keys, bin store keys, all documented on the key form

13. Quality of Work

On completion of works the VTL will post-inspect the property and complete the post inspection form. The Void Team will advise the Tenancy Management team when a property is safe to view and will also provide a copy of the original specification and post inspection paperwork so that a copy can be given to the incoming tenant along with details of future appointment dates and job numbers.

14. Health & Safety

The VTL will supervise operational staff throughout the voids work and control Health and Safety on site. No unauthorised personnel or prospective tenants should visit site during the voids work without prior clearance from the VTL. Once attending site, access may still be refused if the operational staff on site consider the site not to be safe.

Throughout the void period, the VTL, in conjunction with Property Services, will ensure full compliance with L8 Water Management, including testing, chlorination and flushing as necessary, retaining comprehensive documentation. Some elements of the process may be carried out by the Council's specialist contractor.

The VTL will ensure compliance with regards to The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 e.g. fire doors, warning systems.

15. Additional Work in Hard to Let Properties

There are very few hard to let properties, and those are generally restricted to low demand sheltered properties. All properties that are hard to let are looked at in more detail and additional work around the presentation can be agreed. This may involve agreeing works such as decorating, carpeting or part-furnishing the property as a show home to make it more appealing.

In sheltered hard to let properties, show flats may be created that include furniture and other household items such as soft furnishings.

16. Viewings

Once a property has been allocated to a successful bidder, the TMO arranges for the prospective tenant to jointly view the property with them as soon as is practical, either when the outgoing tenant is still in situ or when a void property is considered to be in a safe condition to allow it. Where possible, the TMO will talk the prospective tenant through any void work still to be carried out and any programmed work that will take place at a future time. The TMO will obtain a firm indication of the intention of the prospective tenant as to whether they are likely to accept the property. See also section 9 – Accompanied Viewings.

17. Sign Ups

The TMO will arrange for the sign up to take place as soon as a property is considered ready to let by the VTL. A sign up may take place at the viewing.

18. Weekly Voids Meeting

A weekly Voids Meeting is held that would normally be attended by the Tenancy Management Manager, the Responsive Repairs and Voids Manager, the Voids and Transport Manager, the Allocations Manager and the Maintenance and Surveying Manager. Substitutes should attend if necessary.

The meeting discusses current and future void properties individually, identifying target work completion dates and challenging each part of the process from advertising through to sign up.

The work of the Voids Team will also be prioritised around properties where the applicant is ready to be signed up wherever possible.

19. Performance Management

The voids performance will be monitored through the weekly Voids Meeting and Key Performance Indicators will be reported on through the corporate performance management system.

All teams will update the relevant Void Pathway events on the housing management information system throughout the process to enable performance to be effectively monitored.

The Key Performance Indicators to be reported on are defined in the Housemark Priority Performance Benchmarking Guidance Manual 2015.

General Needs Properties

- Average re-let time in days (standard re-lets)
- Average re-let time in days (major works units, including time spent in works)
- Average re-let time in days (all re-lets, including time spent in works)

Sheltered Properties

- Average re-let time in days (all re-lets, including time spent in works)

All properties

- Average re-let time in days (all re-lets, including time spent in works)
- Void works repair time (standard re-lets)
- Void works repair time (major works)

Targets against these indicators will be agreed annually.