

Version

3



Housing Management

Empty Homes

Scope:	This policy applies to Circle 33 Housing Trust, Commercial and Leasehold, EPIC Trust, Mercian Housing Association, Mole Valley Housing Association, Old Ford Housing Association, Roddons Housing Association, Russet Homes, South Anglia Housing and Wherry Housing Association
Effective Date:	February 2010
Review Date:	August 2011
Signed Off :	Group Policy Forum, 27 th July 2009
Author:	Amy Carter, Group Policy
Policy Owned by:	Group Policy
National Standards	Home Tenancy Value for Money
Other Regulation:	n/a
Legislation:	Housing Act 2004 (Decent Homes Standard)

Enhancing Life Chances

Empty Homes

1 Scope

- 1.1 This policy applies to: Circle 33 Housing Trust, Commercial and Leasehold, EPIC Trust, Mercian Housing Association, Mole Valley Housing Association, Old Ford Housing Association, Roddons Housing Association, Russet Homes, South Anglia Housing, Wherry Housing Association.

This policy sets out the overarching commitments for Group partners when dealing with empty homes and preparing properties for re-letting. The Group policy is supported by the individual Group partners' local procedures. Throughout this policy and procedure there are situations in which discretion can be exercised, as appropriate, to ensure local processes are adhered to.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 Circle Anglia works to improve people's life chances through providing great homes and reliable services to residents, and through helping build sustainable communities where people want to live and work.
- 2.2 Circle Anglia is committed to effectively managing empty homes (void properties). Our aim is to ensure that our empty properties are repaired to a consistently high standard and re-let as quickly as possible.
- 2.3 Minimising re-let time on properties forms part of our commitment to
- delivering the Group's Asset Management strategy,
 - reducing costs and rental income lost during the void time
 - meeting housing need within the areas in which we work.

3 Policy

Ending the tenancy

- 3.1 We will react promptly when our tenants indicate that they wish to terminate the tenancy. We will explain and carry out the processes for returning the keys, inspecting the property, arranging payment of any rent arrears and clearing the property.
- 3.2 It is at Group partner discretion whether to insist that residents provide a 28 day notice period or whether the tenant can surrender their tenancy prior to the end of the notice period, providing all obligations are met.
- 3.3 Any goods or property which is left behind after the former tenant has left will be dealt with in accordance with the law and our [procedures](#).
- 3.4 All staff will be alert to information about properties becoming void without proper notice and will notify the appropriate team to ensure properties are not void for long periods.

Void works

- 3.5 We will undertake a full void inspection as soon as possible. Either during the notice period or immediately after the former tenant leaves the property. This inspection will identify any works that need doing while the property is empty.
- 3.6 Efficiently managing our empty properties is supported by swift identification of the necessary works specifications and raising works orders to deal with minor or major works as appropriate.
- 3.7 It may be appropriate to change the use or tenure of a property, or sell or demolish the property while it is void. Where this is the case, a void appraisal will take place to make the decision.
- 3.8 Wherever possible, we will not reverse major adaptations. We will take steps to re-let the property to a household which requires such an adaptation.
- 3.9 We will be pro-active in monitoring the progress of any works and will work with contractors to resolve any issues that arise to ensure that works are completed within the specified time.
- 3.10 Properties will be regularly inspected during and after the works, to check the standard of contractors' work and to affirm that we are receiving value for money within our set timescales. In some localities a Circle Anglia officer will oversee the works on site.
- 3.11 Properties which have undergone major works will be checked by a suitably qualified officer, usually a surveyor, to ensure the works are completed to the appropriate standard within the set timescale.
- 3.12 Works undertaken to bring properties into line with the Decent Homes standard will be done once a new resident has moved into the property. This is to encourage the resident to have choices about the works that are done.

Safety checks

- 3.13 We will ensure that all fixed electrical systems are working safely.
- 3.14 In accordance with our statutory obligation, we will ensure that individual gas installations in rented properties have been serviced and a gas safety certificate is issued before the resident moves in.

Energy Performance Certificates (EPC)

- 3.15 Energy performance tests will be carried out once every 10 years. Where a new resident is moving in to a property, they will be provided with a copy of the EPC.

New Developments

- 3.16 New developments will be handed over to the registered provider on a set date. Where the handover date is going to be delayed, we will keep residents informed of any changes to the date they are due to move.

Letting standards

- 3.17 We will meet the Circle Anglia standard for letting properties. Group partners will act to exceed the minimum standard wherever possible.
- 3.18 We will not usually decorate general needs properties before letting. However, where it is clear that the property will need redecorating soon a decorations allowance may be offered to an incoming tenant.
- 3.19 Where rooms in shared supported housing become vacant, we will redecorate, where necessary, before the tenant moves in.

Allocating and letting

- 3.20 We will act quickly to make the appropriate decisions about allocating properties in order to best meet local housing need. This decision will be made in line with the individual registered provider's Lettings and Allocations policies and will take into account the Group Lettings policy where relevant.
- 3.21 The prospective tenant will be offered a viewing and wherever possible, we will arrange for the tenancy agreement to be signed on the same day.
- 3.22 At the sign-up, we will explain the tenant's rights and responsibilities in accordance with their tenancy agreement. We will give the resident copies of the handbook and appropriate leaflets.
- 3.23 We will visit the property within eight weeks of the resident moving in to ensure the tenancy is progressing well and the resident has no concerns.

Support properties

- 3.24 Supported housing properties will be repaired and relet in the same way as general needs properties. Where the scheme requires it, an assessment and interview process will be carried out to ensure the property would be suitable for the new resident.

Hard-to-let properties

- 3.25 Where properties are hard-to-let, this can result in a longer period of being empty, and properties may become long term void. We will closely manage and monitor our empty properties to resolve any ongoing issues and co-ordinate work to ensure the property is let as quickly as possible.
- 3.26 We will take a systematic approach based on our knowledge of local issues when dealing with hard-to-let properties and we will endeavour to apply creative local solutions to resolve difficulties, for example, undertaking multiple viewings.
- 3.27 Where appropriate, we will consult residents living in that area to find out what issues may be resulting in hard-to-let properties.

4 Target Re-let Times

- 4.1 The target re-let times differ for each Group partner, this is because the housing stock type and housing need vary depending on the area.
- 4.2 The process for measuring “end to end” re-let time is consistent across the Group. Re-let times are monitored by the Group performance team based on the CORE definition of a re-let, where a CORE form is used.

Group partner	Target re-let time – general needs (2009-10) in calendar days	Target re-let time – sheltered/supported housing (2009-10) in calendar days
Circle 33	28	42
Mole Valley	25	100
Old Ford	25	25
Roddons	21	42
Russet	30	42
South Anglia	26	35
Wherry	20	35

- 4.3 Commercial and Leasehold monitor the re-let target times for intermediate rent and market rent properties across the Group. The re-let target time is 24 calendar days.
- 4.4 We will closely monitor re-let performance and produce regular reports to show whether we are performing against current targets. This information is then used to identify areas where the process can be improved and to reduce re-let times.
- 4.5 Target re-let times are set annually and reviewed every 6 months.
- 4.6 We will use the re-let information collected by the CORE process to inform service improvements and to monitor our lettings processes.

Glossary

Term	Definition
CORE	COntinuous REcording – this is a system for monitoring lettings undertaken by local authorities and housing associations.
GPF	Group Policy Forum
Handover	When a developer finishes a building programme and the landlord or letting agent is given access to the finished building.
Re-let	Re-letting a property is the process we follow when a property has been let before and has been vacated
Sign-up	The process of explaining and signing a tenancy agreement with a new resident.
SMPRG	Senior Managers Policy Review Group
Void	When the property is empty. A property is described as void where the former resident has moved out and the new resident has not yet moved in.

Related Documents

Document	Link
Connected Policies:	Death of Tenant Electrical Safety Gas Safety (Heating Installations) Legionella Management Joint Tenants Starter Tenants
Forms and Letters:	Landlord's NTQ Sign-up form Tenant's NTQ Tort Notice 1 Tort Notice 2
Leaflets:	Property Letting Service Standards
Other:	Long Term Void definition Orchard Voids Manual When a Core Form is needed

Version history

Version no.	1	Date effective:	October 2006
Full / partial review?	n/a		
Brief summary of changes:	n/a		
Staff consultation (teams):			
Resident consultation:			
Signed off by:	Group Policy Forum, 15 th September 2006		
Author:	Zoe Buick, Policy Officer		

Version no.	2	Date effective:	August 2009
Full / partial review?	Full review		
Brief summary of changes:	New procedure has been added, including safety checks, major/minor works, sign-up and interview procedures. New Group partners have been integrated.		
Staff consultation (teams):	Housing and property management at all Group partners. Heads of Continuous Improvement.		
Resident consultation:	<p>Roddons TAG: 26th March 09, EPIC Service User Policy Forum (South Anglia): 23rd April 09, EPIC Service User Policy Forum (Swan Yard): 2nd April 09, Wherry Resident Policy Review Day: 11th May 09 Circle 33 Group set up for this purpose: 14th May 09 The resident feedback resulted in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When visiting before the end of the tenancy extra considerations added to including vulnerabilities and bereavement. • Viewings being allowed during works periods as long as it was safe to do so and CA staff were able to explain what the property would look like after the works. • Providing more help and information to residents at the viewing to allow them to make an informed decision, and wherever possible, allowing residents to view the property before they sign-up. • Making new residents aware of resident associations and forums, dealing with any complaints or arrears and providing further local information such as parking arrangements at the early tenancy visit. • Opinion was divided on the subject of whether Circle Anglia should decorate properties, provide cash or vouchers. The current approach is to vary the option based on the vulnerabilities of the residents and the condition of the property. 		

Signed off by:	Group Policy Forum, 27 th July 2009
Author:	Amy Carter, Policy Officer

Version no.	3	Date effective:	February 2010
Full / partial review?	Desktop review		
Brief summary of changes:	Update of information on tort notices and dealing with former tenant goods		
Staff consultation (teams):	N/A		
Resident consultation:	N/A		
Other Consultation	Devonshires Solicitors – review of information around tort notices.		
Signed off by:	Group Policy		
Author:	Group Policy		