

AGENDA ITEM 5

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: REVIEW OF STANDARD FOR RE-LETTING PROPERTIES
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 13 January 2015
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek members' approval to amend the current Voids Management Policy in relation to the Standard for Re-letting Properties.
- 1.2 The Council is obliged to review its policies on a regular basis to ensure that account is taken of legislative changes, customer feedback and the standards set in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current Standard for Re-letting Properties has been in use for more than ten years and over the years Elected Member and customer feedback has shown increased expectations from customers when renting a Council house.
- 2.2 As well as the standard needing updated, a review was also needed to address the most common issues which arise for new tenants, such as condition of décor and plasterwork repairs. It is also acknowledged that there is a need to give clarity to applicants regarding what they can expect when obtaining the tenancy of a Falkirk Council house.

3. CONSULTATION WITH TENANTS AND OTHER SERVICE USERS

- 3.1 To obtain the views of tenants, applicants for housing, and other customers regarding the void standard, a Questionnaire (Appendix 1) was made available for a period from early June to late August 2014. In seeking to target customers in a broad range of different housing situations, the questionnaire was available as a paper document in all Falkirk Council One-Stop Shops, on-line with the weekly Homespot applicant newsletter, advertised on the front page of the Council's website for the duration of the consultation period, and available as a survey on-line on the Council's website.
- 3.2 Questionnaires were sent to all Tenants and Residents Groups with the offer of a member of staff to meet with them to discuss the consultation. The Questionnaire was also completed with new tenants at settling-in visits and was highlighted at the Tenants' and Residents' Forum.

- 3.3 The current Standard for Re-letting Properties was appended to the Questionnaire and comment boxes were available at each section to capture any additional points which respondents wanted to bring into the consultation.

4 PROPOSED NEW STANDARD FOR LETTING COUNCIL HOUSING

- 4.1 The responses from the Questionnaire (Appendix 2) have informed the proposed new Standard for Letting Council Housing (Appendix 3) which has incorporated requirements of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, contributes to the Council's Zero Waste Strategy, and where goods are left by the previous tenant, seeks to assist new tenants with the offer of essential household items.

- 4.2 The Council's proposals were endorsed without exception by the majority of respondents. The main findings from the Questionnaire and changes being proposed to the void standard are detailed below:

4.3 Repair Stage at which Properties Re-Let

- 4.3.1 The majority of respondents to the questionnaire (56%) told us that they are in favour of the current approach to the stage at which new tenants gain access to their tenancy being kept, that is, that essential checks and essential repairs are carried out to the property prior to occupation, whilst non-essential repairs are carried out once the new tenant is in the house. This approach is proposed on the basis that applicants benefit from getting into their new home as quickly as possible and all parties benefit from lost rental income being reduced.

- 4.3.2 Work identified as requiring to be carried out prior to the property being re-let is marked with asterisks on the Proposed New Standard for Letting Council Housing at appendix 3, and includes items such as Health and Safety checks and void deep cleans

4.4 Assistance to New Tenants

- 4.4.1 Many respondents commented that in the current economic climate when people often cannot afford expensive household items, offering items to the new tenant left by the previous tenant was a good idea, on the understanding that if the new tenant did not want them, the Council would dispose of them. Recycling household items also contributes to the Council's Zero Waste Strategy.

- 4.4.2 To address these issues, the following have been added to the proposed new standard:
- Where the previous tenant has left floor coverings, blinds, and white goods in the property in a good condition, these will be offered to the incoming tenant (electrical goods will be safety checked).

- Alterations made by the previous tenant which meet safety and quality standards and improve the standard of the property, will be left for the incoming tenant.
- A-rated, low energy light bulbs will be fitted in all rooms – to the benefit of new tenants and as a carbon reduction measure in line with the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing.

4.5 **Internal Repairs**

A number of internal repairs were consulted upon and the following is proposed:

4.5.1 Kitchen

In line with our commitment to tenant consultation, where a void property has been assessed as needing a new kitchen and a new tenant has been identified for the property, the proposed new standard commits to consulting with the incoming tenant to agree layout and style of units.

4.5.2 Internal Decoration

In line with the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement, the internal decoration of the property remains the responsibility of the tenant however, we recognise that it can be the deciding factor in an applicant accepting or refusing a property. If the previous tenant has left the property in a state of poor decoration, it may be offered to several people before it is accepted. This is not beneficial to either applicants or the Council and to address this issue we are proposing the following approach:

- That the decorative standard is that all wallpapered and painted walls will be intact and clean, with an allowance made for wear. Where there are no wall coverings, internal wall surfaces will be in a good condition for decoration.
- In line with the Allocations Policy, we will continue to enforce the suspension of applicants from the housing waiting list until their house is in good decorative order. In doing this we will make these applicants aware of our decorative standard.
- As is current practice, tenants terminating their tenancy will be advised where décor requires to be brought up to the standard, failing which, we will carry out the redecoration once the property is void and recharge them.

4.5.3 Internal Decoration to Properties in Low Demand

100% of respondents to the questionnaire agreed to the proposal that additional decoration, above the decorative standard, be carried out to properties in low demand or where refused by several applicants in order to make them more attractive to rent. In addition, as part of the Allocations Policy review, consideration is being given to decoration allowances or packs and other incentives for stimulating interest in low demand properties.

4.5.4 Plasterwork

We recognise that some repair issues only become apparent once the new tenant moves into the property. The most common tends to be the need for plasterwork repairs, revealed once people start to strip wallpaper. For older properties, we will make new tenants aware that due to the age of the property and the fact that plasterwork dries out over time, when stripping wallpaper they may come across plasterwork which needs renewed and that they should contact us so that we can attend to the repair.

4.5.5 Cleanliness

As outlined above, it is the tenant's responsibility to leave their property in a clean condition, however, following work being carried out there have been some comments and complaints about the standard of cleanliness. To address this we are proposing to improve the specification with regard to the cleanliness of the property and have properties cleaned to a "sparkle clean" standard, free of debris.

4.6 **External Repairs**

4.6.1 Garden Area

Similar to our proposal to recycle household items to the benefit of the new tenants, the new standard proposes to leave sheds for the incoming tenants, as well as offer them the opportunity to take ownership of garden furniture and garden ornaments.

In addition, as outlined in our allocations policy, tenants will be suspended from the housing waiting list unless their garden is maintained to an acceptable standard. Where a tenant terminates their tenancy and leaves their garden area in a poor condition they will be recharged the cost of bringing the garden up to a reasonable condition and for the removal of rubbish and abandoned goods.

5 **SERVICE STANDARDS ONCE PROPERTY IS LET**

The new proposed standard for re-letting also seeks to address the issue of new tenants not having gas or water supplies promptly at the start of their tenancy by giving the following commitments, assuming access is available:

- All gas systems functioning within 24 hours of tenant confirming their gas and electricity supplier.
- Where water supply drained down, water turned on within 24 hours.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The questionnaire gave the average cost of our current void standard as £2,500 with an average void period of 24 days. In light of respondents' comments and customer expectations, we anticipate that the cost of additional works would be off-set by greater tenant satisfaction and fewer complaints. With the exception of additional decoration to low demand properties, the proposed new void standard is not expected to affect the turnaround time for void properties. Additional costs for proposed new works to void properties are noted below.

- Approximate additional cost for low energy light bulbs throughout the house is £45 per property.
- For a two-bedroom property in low demand or refused by several applicants where additional decoration would be considered to make it more attractive, the approximate cost of fully redecorating would be £1800 and the property would be void for an additional two weeks.

The above cost can be met from existing budgets.

7 PUBLICATION OF NEW STANDARD

The Standard for re-letting properties will be published as an appendix to the Void Management Policy (appendix 4) which has been updated to reflect changes in legislation.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members:

- 8.1 **approve the new Standard for Letting Properties.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Date: 2 December 2014

Ref: AAP – Review of Standard for Re-letting Properties 141202

Contact Name: Kenny Gillespie Property & Asset Manager
Jennifer Litts Head of Housing Services

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 540856 and ask for Kenny Gillespie.

Council Housing: Standards for Letting Questionnaire

Summer 2014



Falkirk Council
Corporate & Neighbourhood Services

Council Housing: Standards for Letting Questionnaire

Introduction

Falkirk Council is looking to get your views on the standards we have for empty houses let to new tenants.

We already have high standards and any property we let should be:

- Safe
- Habitable
- Clean
- Meeting our standard for internal decoration
- Wind and watertight
- Secure
- Have a tidy Garden/Common Area

There are many different ways of ensuring that we meet these standards and we are constantly looking to improve these. Please see Appendix 1 for Current Standards.

We need your opinion on the following additional standards that we are proposing to introduce in the near future. We want to hear if you think these standards are the right way forward.

This questionnaire is also available to complete online at www.falkirk.gov.uk/standardsforletting

Please return your completed questionnaire by 31 July 2014.

Safe

We are proposing to add the following to the Safe standard, do you agree?

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Where a shower is already in place, we will leave it in the property (providing it meets current regulations and is working properly). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Walls will be free from major defects – visible plasterwork will be in a good condition with cracks no wider than 5mm. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Ceilings will be free of polystyrene tiles. Existing artex in a sound condition will remain in place. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Carbon monoxide detector will be installed in properties with a gas supply. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● All gas installations and appliances tested and certified as safe - copy of landlord certificate given to new tenants. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your comments:

Property wind and watertight

We are not planning to make any changes to our standards in this category.

Your comments:

Habitable

We are proposing to add the following to the Habitable standard, do you agree?

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Once tenants confirm who their gas supplier is, all gas systems will be up and running within 24 hours, assuming access is made available. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Existing gas and electricity supplier information will be passed on as soon as we have the information. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Where water supply has been drained down, new tenants will get their water supply turned on within 24 hours, assuming access is made available. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Plumbing will be installed for automatic washing machines where possible. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Meters will be read and recorded when property empty. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Where a kitchen replacement is required, we will consult with the new tenants to agree layout and style of units. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your comments:

Secure (external doors and windows)

We are proposing to add the following to the Secure standard, do you agree?

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● All windows will close securely with keys provided for those with locks. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your comments:

Internal Decoration

Do you agree with the following proposals for the Internal Decoration standard:

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● All wallpapered and painted walls will be intact and clean (with an allowance made for wear and tear). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● Where there is no wallpaper, internal wall surfaces will be in a suitable condition for redecoration by the new tenant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ● If a property is in low demand or where a number of applicants have declined to take the property, we will look at carrying out work to make it more attractive to rent. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your comments:

Clean

We are proposing to add the following to the Clean standard, do you agree?

- Bath/shower area – tiles and seals will be clean and watertight.
- Central heating radiators, storage and panel heaters will be clean
- Property will be to a 'sparkle clean' standard

Yes

☐☐☐

No

☐☐☐

Your comments:

Garden and common areas

We are proposing to add the following to the standard for Garden and Common Areas, do you agree?

- Garden areas cleared of garden furniture and ornaments unless new tenants want to formally accept responsibility for these items.
- Sheds left by previous tenants will remain in place if in a satisfactory condition

Yes

☐☐☐

No

☐☐☐

Your comments:

Start of Tenancies

We recognise that some repair issues only become apparent once the new tenant moves into the property.

We will ask new tenants to report any issues as quickly as possible so that we can attend to them.

The following questions will help us get a better idea of what you consider to be acceptable and the standards we should set. These standards will also help us determine how quickly we can attend to a property to get it ready to let.

1 Please choose one of the following standards which you think we should adopt:

☐

Current Standard

Keeping this standard means carrying out essential checks required by law as well as some repairs to the property. The average cost of our current standard is £2,500 each property, which means the property is empty for an approximate period of 24 days.

☐

Basic Standard - Carry out essential checks only

This new standard would mean that new tenants could move in sooner. The average cost of this basic standard would be £1,400 each property, keeping the property empty for approximately 14 days.

☐

Superior Standard - Carry out all work when houses are empty and redecorate where necessary

The average cost for this superior standard would be approximately £5,000 each property, keeping the property empty for approximately 35 days.

This standard will mean a greater part of your rent will be paying for work to empty houses leaving less money available for other work such as property and environmental improvements.

Your comments:

- 2 Tenants often leave floor coverings, cookers and other goods in the property when they give up their tenancy. If they are in a reasonable condition, do you think that we should leave these goods for the next tenant's use?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Your comments:

- 3 We find that the state of internal decoration can be a big factor in deciding to take a property. We are proposing to tell tenants that they may need to redecorate certain areas/rooms before leaving.

Do you agree? Yes ☐ No ☐

Your comments:

- 4 If tenants have already left the property and have not left the decoration in a reasonable condition, we are proposing to carry out the redecoration work and re-charge the previous tenants.

Do you agree? Yes ☐ No ☐

Your comments:

- 5 Do you think that we should offer incentives to encourage tenants who are giving up their tenancy to leave the property in a good condition?

eg If keys are returned within the 28 day notice period and the house is in a good condition, rent payment would not be required for the remainder of the notice period.

Do you agree? Yes ☐ No ☐

Your comments:

Thank you for your comments.
We appreciate you taking the time to give your views about our proposed
Council Housing: Standards for Letting

About You...

Are you:

- ☐ a tenant of Falkirk Council
☐ an applicant for housing with Falkirk Council
☐ neither of the above

Are you:

- ☐ Male ☐ Female

How old are you?

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

How to respond

Please return your completed questionnaire by 31 July 2014 to:

Your local One Stop Shop

or

Lynne Dougall

The Forum,

Callendar Business Park,

Falkirk

FK1 1XR

More Information

For more information, or to discuss any aspect of this consultation, please email: lynne.dougall@falkirk.gov.uk

Results will be treated confidentially and individual responses will remain anonymous. Findings will influence our Council Housing: Standards for Letting which will be reported to the Executive of Falkirk Council. Outcomes will be reported in our tenants' magazine "Tenant Talk", in our Homespot Newsletter, and on our website.

Appendix 1: Current Standards for Letting Council Housing

Safe

- Electrical systems tested and certified as being safe
- All water and waste systems will work properly and be free from leaks
- Electrical fixtures and fittings will be free of excessive paint on coverings/cover plates
- Flooring and stairs will be structurally sound and stable
- Mains smoke detector installed/checked
- Handrails checked for safe use
- Sanitary ware replaced to match existing where broken or cracked

Property wind and watertight

- Roof, external walls, external doors, and windows will be wind and watertight

Habitable

- Broken or cracked panes of glass will be replaced
- Checked for rising damp and remedial work instructed where necessary
- Doors, door handles and locks in good working order
- Defective flooring and skirting repaired/replaced as necessary
- Kitchen worktops replaced where damaged and loose kitchen units/doors/drawers secured
- Plasterwork repairs carried out where necessary

Secure

- Where existing external door has a yale lock only, a mortice lock will be installed.
- External locks changed
- All window mechanisms functioning properly

Internal Decoration

- Whilst internal decoration of the property is the tenant's responsibility, in exceptional circumstances, redecoration will be carried out where the property has been left in an uninhabitable condition

Clean

- The property should be clean, free from debris and swept out
- Kitchen units, cupboards, work surfaces and sanitary ware should be clean
- Garden rubbish, external stores and attic spaces should be cleared

Garden and Common Areas

- External repairs carried to rhones, down-pipes, roof tiles, chimney heads, steps, paths, handrails, railings, fencing, clothes poles, ramps
- Gardens tidied up as appropriate

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ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਜ਼ਬਾਨ, ਬਲੈਂਡ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਤੇ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਸ਼ੁੱਧ ਕਰਕੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਸਥਾਨਕ ਨੇਬਰਹੁਡ ਆਫਿਸ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ

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Falkirk Council
Corporate & Neighbourhood Services

Appendix 2

Council Housing: Standards for Letting Questionnaire Findings

Introduction

The consultation was open for the period 5 June – 31 July 2014 with the final closing date running to late August 2014 to take account of the holiday period. A total of 89 people responded to the questionnaire: 8 people used the on-line survey monkey and 81 people completed the paper questionnaire.

Profile of respondents

- 69% of respondents were Council tenants
- 9.2% of respondents were applicants for housing with the Council
- 21.8% were neither of the above

- The age of respondents ranged from 17 to 80
- 36% of respondents were under 40 years old
- 64% were aged 40 and above

- 69% of respondents were female
- 31% were male

Results

Safe Standard	Agree	Disagree
1. Leave shower in property	97.8%	2.2%
2. Walls free from major defects	98.9%	1.1%
3. Ceilings free of polystyrene tiles. Artex if sound will remain in place	93.2%	6.8%
4. Carbon monoxide detector installed	100%	---
5. All gas appliances tested & certified	100%	---

Comment: 5 people commented that artex should be removed.

Property Wind and Watertight Standard

No additional points raised

Habitable Standard

1. Gas systems up and running within 24 hrs	98.9%	1.1%
2. Energy supplier info passed on asap	97.7%	2.3%
3. Water turned on within 24 hrs	98.9%	1.1%
4. Plumbing installed for auto w/machines	96.6%	3.4%
5. Meters read and recorded when void	100%	---

Comments mainly related to kitchens:

- Kitchens should always be put in with tenant having their say
- Kitchens should be replaced if over 5 years old
- Damaged worktops should be replaced as they can attract viruses, bugs
- Choice of additional units should be offered to new tenants

Secure Standard	Agree	Disagree
1. All windows will close securely with keys provided for those with locks	98.8%	1.2%

Comment: windows above first floor level should have safety restrictors fitted

Internal Decoration Standard

1. All wallpapered & painted walls will be intact and clean (allowance for wear and tear)	97.6%	2.4%
2. where no wallpaper, walls in suitable condition for redecoration	98.9%	1.1%
3. Carry out additional work to low demand properties	100%	---

Comments:

- Badly decorated properties should be painted white throughout
- Ceilings painted white would be helpful to new tenants
- Would recommend a first coat seal at least in livingroom
- Agree point 1 except for woodchip
- Remove all artex

Clean Standard

1. Bath/shower area will be clean and watertight	98.9%	1.1%
2. Radiators, storage & panel heaters will be clean	97.7%	2.3%
3. Property to "sparkle clean" standard	96.6%	3.4%

Comments:

- Recommend splashback tiles around wh basin and bath
- Baths need replacing due to wear and tear on enamel
- "sparkle clean" is open to interpretation

Garden and Common Areas Standard

1. cleared of furniture & ornaments unless new tenant accepts responsibility	100%	---
2. Sheds will remain in place if in good condition	100%	---

Comments:

- Any debris removed/sheds emptied

- Will outgoing tenant be responsible for supplying shed keys?
- Previous tenants' rubbish should all be removed

Standard to be Adopted

Agree

1. Current standard	55.8%
2. Basic standard	25.6%
3. Superior standard	18.6%

Comments:

- Current standard and for other repairs work with tenant around their schedule
- Basic standard should be on high side of basic
- Certain repairs etc carried out once new tenant moves in as long as done in certain timescale and not forgotten or delayed

Agree

Disagree

Should floor coverings, white goods etc be left for next tenant?

86.4%

13.6%

Comments:

- All new tenants should be given the choice to keep anything left
- If new tenant agrees
- Really helpful to homeless people

Should we tell outgoing tenants to redecorate certain areas before leaving

72.9%

27.1%

Comments:

- Maybe tenant can't afford to decorate
- Council should redecorate all properties in a neutral colour
- Surely most people wish to redecorate anyway

If decoration not been left in reasonable condition, should we do and recharge?

78.2%

21.8%

Comments:

- In theory great, but people may not be in a position to do so
- Maybe charge only half the cost
- Yes if decoration is really poor

Should we offer incentives to outgoing tenants?

85.2%

14.8%

Comments:

- Good idea
- Yes, if moving paying double rent can be a crippling burden
- Not needed, people should leave their house in a good condition or be fined

End

Appendix 3

Falkirk Council: Standard for Letting Council Housing

The following details the work to be carried out to void properties.

Work marked with an asterisk will be done before the property is re-let.

Previous Tenancy: Alterations/Adaptations/Items left

1. Alterations made by the previous tenant will be left in place if they meet current safety standards, the Council's quality standards, and they improve the standard of the property, for example but not limited to: lighting, doors, showers
2. Adaptations provided for a previous tenant may be left for the incoming tenant if reasonable to do so, eg a level access shower
3. Items in a good condition left by the previous tenant with the Council's agreement, such as floor coverings, window blinds, and white goods will be left in the property and offered to the incoming tenant
4. Any abeyances in terms of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard will be addressed as part of the void process, where possible.

Gas and Electrical Supplies and Systems

1. * Gas and electrical supplies and systems will be checked for safety and will be in good working order. These include:
 - Heating systems
 - Mains wired smoke detectors (to replace battery detectors)
 - Xpelair fans
 - Any white goods left for incoming tenant
 - Any shower left for incoming tenant
2. * Carbon monoxide detector will be installed/checked where there is a gas supply to the property
3. * Where required, A-rated low energy light bulbs will be fitted in all rooms – the equivalent of 100w in the kitchen and 60w in all other rooms
4. Kitchen will have a minimum of 6 electrical sockets, where possible
5. * Electrical fixtures and fittings will be free of excessive paint on coverings/cover plates
6. * Gas and electricity meters will be read and recorded when property void
7. * Gas safety certificate will be given to incoming tenant

Solid Fuel Central Heating Systems, Coal, Gas and Electric Fires

1. * Solid fuel central heating systems and coal fire arrangements will be taken out and replaced with either gas or electric wet central heating systems.
2. * Electric storage heating system will be replaced by gas central heating system (if gas supply in area) or if no gas supply, with electric wet central heating system.
3. * Gas and electric fires, hearths and electric fireplace suites will be removed
4. * Cast iron/ceramic tiled fireplaces in bedrooms and kitchens will be removed

Plumbing

1. * All water and waste systems will be checked and free from leaks
2. * Sanitary ware will be replaced to match existing where broken or cracked
3. * Plumbing will be installed for automatic washing machine
4. * Insulation cover 80mm minimum thickness will be fitted to hot water tank, if not in place/if not to required thickness
5. * Toilet seat and lid will be renewed
6. * Lead-lined cold water tank will be replaced

Security

1. * External locks will be changed and the new tenant given a minimum two sets of keys
2. Where fitted, the communal door entry system will be working (unless ownership within close prevents repairs being carried out) and the new tenant will be given a minimum of two fobs
3. * Any external door with a yale lock only will have a mortice lock fitted
4. * All windows will close securely
5. Windows with locks will have keys provided

External Elements

1. * The following will be checked and repaired as necessary to ensure property is wind and watertight:
 - Roof
 - Chimney heads
 - Rhones and downpipes
 - External walls
 - External doors
 - Windows
 - Window panes – broken or cracked, will be replaced

Internal Elements - Throughout

1. * Property checked for rising damp, wet and dry rot, and remedial work instructed where necessary
2. * An asbestos check will be carried out to the property and the certificate issued to the incoming tenant
3. * The property will be assessed for its energy efficiency rating and the energy performance certificate will be issued to the new tenant
4. * Defective flooring, skirting, and stair treads will be repaired/replaced as necessary
5. Doors, door handles and locks will be in a good condition and in good working order
6. Door standards and facings will be replaced where damaged
7. * Banisters and handrails will be checked and secured as necessary
8. * Doors with glass panelling which does not meet current safety standards will be replaced with standard doors
9. Pipe work and electric meters will be boxed in, with meter boxes having door for access.

Internal Elements – Kitchen

1. Kitchen worktops will be repaired/replaced where damaged, to match existing
2. * Kitchen units, doors, and drawers will be checked and secured as necessary
3. If kitchen is assessed as needing replaced, the number of units and their capacity will meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard where possible (see below re tenant consultation)

Internal Decoration

1. * All wallpapered and painted walls will be intact and clean, with an allowance made for wear
2. * Where there is no decoration, internal wall surfaces will be in a suitable condition for redecoration by the new tenant, that is, walls will be free from major defects – with visible plasterwork in a good condition with cracks no wider than 5mm
3. * Ceilings will be free of polystyrene tiles.
4. Existing artex in a sound condition will remain in place.
5. If a property is in low demand or where a number of applicants have declined to take the property, we will carry out internal decoration to make it more attractive to rent by raising the decorative standard.

Standard of Cleanliness

1. * The property will be cleaned to a sparkle clean standard and free of debris.
2. * The above includes kitchen units, cupboards, work surfaces, sanitary ware and central heating radiators, storage and panel heaters.
3. * In the bath/shower area, tiles, seals and grouting will be clean and watertight
4. * Shower cubicle/shower curtain will be clean and in a good condition
5. * External lock-ups and attic spaces will be cleared out

Garden and Common Areas

1. Garden areas will be cleared of garden furniture and ornaments unless incoming tenants formally accept responsibility for such items
2. Sheds and decking in a satisfactory condition will remain in place
3. * Paths, steps, handrails, and ramps will be checked and repaired/re-secured as necessary
4. Gates, fencing, and clothes poles will be repaired/re-secured as necessary
5. * Garden will be cleared of any rubbish/abandoned household items
6. Fencing will be installed to box in the front garden
7. Overgrown trees/hedges/shrubs will be cut back or taken out as appropriate
8. Where the property is a long-term void, the garden area will receive basic garden maintenance to keep it in a reasonable condition

Consultation with Incoming Tenants

1. Where a kitchen replacement is required and a new tenant has been identified, we will consult with the incoming tenant to agree layout and style of units
2. Where we have agreed that outgoing tenants can leave floor coverings, cooker, and/or other goods in the property, we will offer them to the incoming tenants on the basis that they take ownership and repair/replacement/removal responsibility for them.
3. As above, incoming tenants will be offered any garden furniture and ornaments left in a good condition.

Once Property is Let

1. All gas systems will be up and running within 24 hours of the tenant confirming their electricity and gas suppliers, assuming access is available
2. Instructions for operating the heating system will be given to the tenant at the start of their tenancy
3. Where water supply has been drained down, water supply will be turned on within 24 hours, assuming access is available
4. Existing gas and electricity supplier information will be passed on to new tenant as soon as we have the information
5. For older properties, new tenants will be made aware that when stripping wallpaper they may come across plasterwork which needs renewed and that they should contact us to attend to the repair
6. If grass is overgrown, a one-off cut will be carried out for the incoming tenant

Falkirk Council Void Management Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out Falkirk Council's approach to managing its void properties. It details the standards, measures and performance targets it sets to ensure that void properties are let as quickly as possible to maximise use of the Council's housing stock and minimise rental loss.
- 1.2 Void properties are properties which are not tenanted and accordingly generate no income. The void period is the time from the end date of the previous tenancy to the start date of the new tenancy, measured in calendar days.
- 1.3 The policy assists the Council meet the standards set by the Scottish Social Housing Charter, objectives in its Service Performance Plan and Zero Waste Strategy, and to achieve best value in the use of its resources. Importantly, it assists the Council in providing decent, secure and affordable housing to people in housing need.

2. Principles of the Policy

The underlying principles supporting the void management policy are:

- that it complies with legal and regulatory requirements
- complies with good practice
- gives clarity about level of service and standards
- there is consistent application across the service

3. Objectives of the Policy

- 3.1 The overall objective of Falkirk Council's void management policy is to ensure good management of void properties to minimise void periods, maximise rental income, deliver a quality of service which tenants endorse, and to meet housing need.
- 3.2 The policy's objectives are to ensure:
 - best use is made of the Council's housing stock
 - properties which are due to be let meet a satisfactory standard
 - a consistent and transparent lettable standard is applied
 - regularly reviewed SMART targets are set for each stage of the void process
 - effective, efficient, and accountable management of void properties
 - rent loss due to vacant properties is minimised
 - effective monitoring of the void process, standard, and service to tenants to assist in identifying and addressing issues for improvement
 - feedback is sought from outgoing and incoming tenants to help improve management of void properties

- tenants adhere to the conditions of their tenancy agreement and return properties in a good condition
- former tenants are pursued for rechargeable costs arising from termination of tenancy

4. Standard for Letting Properties

- 4.1 This is the standard which all void properties require to achieve prior to a new tenant taking up the tenancy, allowance being made for non-essential works being carried out once the tenancy has started. It is the standard which ensures a property is safe, secure, and fit for occupation.
- 4.2 The Council has a written standard for re-letting properties to ensure there is clarity and a consistent approach to void property management across the service.
- 4.3 Applicants receiving an offer of tenancy will also receive a leaflet detailing what they can expect from their new home.

5. Follow-up Work once Tenancy Started

- 5.1 Repair works to be done once the tenancy has started, or identified at the start of the tenancy, will be carried out within two weeks of the tenancy start date, unless specialist materials or works are required and, of necessity, take longer to complete.
- 5.2 Assuming access is made available and that the tenant has an electricity provider, all gas supplies will be up and running within 24 hours of the tenant confirming their gas supplier. Similarly assuming access is available, where the water supply has been drained down, it will be turned on within 24 hours.

6. Tenancy Termination and Rechargeable Repairs

- 6.1 When a tenant gives notice to terminate their tenancy, staff will carry out a pre-termination inspection of the property early in the notice period to ensure void maintenance costs are minimised by advising the tenant of repairs, redecoration, and garden issues which are their responsibility to rectify.
- 6.2 Outgoing tenants will be informed that if the property and garden are not left in a satisfactory condition, the Council will carry out the repairs/redecoration/garden maintenance and they will be recharged the costs of such work.
- 6.3 Where the tenant is applying for a transfer of housing, their application will be suspended until the property and garden have been brought up to an acceptable standard.

- 6.4 The pre-termination inspection also will identify any improvements carried out by the tenant which qualifies them for re-imbursement under the Tenant's Right to Compensation for Improvements.
- 6.5 With the exception of alterations and contents which the Council has explicitly agreed can be left in the house, tenants will be recharged the Council's costs in replacing/removing such items.
- 6.6 Former tenants will be pursued for rechargeable costs arising from any such work.

7. Approach to Minimising Void Periods

- 7.1 Outgoing tenants will be asked if their property can be advertised during their termination period, prior to them vacating the property.
- 7.2 Properties will be pre-allocated prior to being available for re-letting, with the new tenancy starting as soon as possible once the property is available.
- 7.3 Void inspections will be carried out within two working days.
- 7.4 Repair work which requires to be done whilst the property is vacant will be instructed with a high priority. The property will not be held void awaiting repairs which can be done once the new tenancy has started. A copy of the outstanding work will be issued to the prospective tenant at the viewing stage.
- 7.5 A staff member will accompany a prospective tenant viewing the property and, providing the property is in a reasonable condition, this will be during the period the property is undergoing repair work.
- 7.6 Where keys are handed in to the Council prior to the termination date, the void process will start as if the termination date had been reached, that is, there will be no delay in waiting for the tenancy to terminate formally.
- 7.7 Where there is no demand for a property or where it has been refused several times, consideration will be given to implementing difficult to let strategies, such as, redecorating, holding an open viewing, offering incentives as outlined in the Council's Allocations Policy.

8. Tenants Transferring to another Council Property

- 8.1 Falkirk Council tenants transferring to another Falkirk Council tenancy will require to return their keys to the property they are giving up within three days of receiving the keys to their new tenancy. An extension to this period will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

9. Death of a Tenant

- 9.1 Where a tenant has died and there is no joint tenant or no succession to the tenancy, staff will work sensitively with any family members or a representative to end the tenancy in an effective way.
- 9.2 The tenancy will not be formally ended until the keys are returned.
- 9.3 The Council will write off the rent charge for the first seven days following the death of the tenant. Beyond the seven days, a charge equivalent to the rent for the property will be applied until the keys are returned. A maximum time of three additional weeks, after the first week, will be permitted to the family/representative.

10. Minimising the Occurrence of Void Properties

- 10.1 Effective housing management can contribute to minimising the occurrence of voids and several other policies and procedures feed into this, such as, the allocations policy, rent arrears policy, adaptations procedures, and settling in visits. The Council will seek to implement such policies and procedures effectively to assist tenants to remain in their own homes or prevent them losing their homes.
- 10.2 Within four weeks of the start of a tenancy, staff will carry out a settling in visit with the new tenant, the purpose of which is to seek to ensure the tenant has all necessary information and assistance needed to help them sustain their tenancy. At this settling in visit, the tenant will be asked about their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the standard of their new home. Details of any areas of dissatisfaction will be collated to enable the Council to identify any trends and take remedial or improvement action where appropriate.
- 10.3 When a tenant notifies their intention to terminate their tenancy, staff will seek to identify the reason/s for termination. This information will be collated to enable the Council to identify any trends and to take remedial or improvement action where appropriate.
- 10.4 As well as minimising the occurrence of void properties, these actions will also support the Council in its efforts to increase tenancy sustainment outcomes.

11. Setting Challenging Targets

- 11.1 Annual targets for average void turnaround times and void rent loss will be set. The aim is to work towards continuous improvement and the target will be reviewed each year through analysis of key performance indicators.
- 11.2 Targets for year 2014/15 are:
 - Average void turnaround time: not to exceed 24 calendar days
 - Rent loss due to void properties: not exceeding 1% of rental income

12. Measuring Performance

- 12.1 Key performance indicator reports will include analysis of void performance and trends to assist with effective void management.
- 12.2 The Council will monitor its void management performance against the performance of other Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords through established benchmarking groups and Scottish Social Housing Charter results.

13. Complaints

- 13.1 Complaints or appeals against actions based on this policy will be processed through the Council's Complaints Procedure.

14. Review

- 14.1 This policy is subject to review on a three yearly basis.