

Procedure for dealing with empty council properties (voids procedure)

1. Aims

The aims of this procedure are:

1. To minimize the period of time between one tenant vacating and the next tenant moving in and thereby to keep to a minimum the financial loss to the TMO.
2. To provide a high standard of service to the incoming tenant by ensuring that all vacant properties are in good repair, good decorative order and clean.
3. To meet and where possible exceed the timescales / targets and service standards set by the council and enshrined in the management agreement.

2. Before vacation

2.1 As soon as FPMG is notified that a tenant intends to give up the tenancy, an appointment will be made for an inspection of the premises before the vacation date. This is an opportunity to check on the condition of the property and assess the lettable of the property upon vacation. It will also assist in quantifying the cost of any damage to the property caused by the outgoing tenant and allow for recharging.

2.2 Wherever possible, agreement will be reached on the date of return of the keys and the rent to be paid up to that date.

2.3 The four weeks' notice period will not be enforced when it is reasonable to agree a shorter period, in order to avoid the creation of irrecoverable former tenant arrears.

2.4 If the keys are not returned by 12 noon on the Monday rent will be charged for that week.

2.5 Where a property becomes void as a result of the death of a tenant, the family should be granted one week rent free after the death of the tenant to make funeral arrangements and clear the property. If requested and if the rent is paid in advance, up to a further two weeks may be allowed.

3. Void inspection

3.1. An inspection of the property should be carried out within 48 hours of the return of the keys.

3.2. If keys are not returned, the locks should be changed immediately.

3.3 At the inspection a list of repairs required to the property is made, separated into those that are the responsibility of the council (including heating / hot water and asbestos items) or claimable on the council's insurance, and those that are the responsibility of the TMO.

3.4. At the inspection a note will be made of the decorative standard of each room and a decision made in respect of each room whether, in accordance with FPMG policy:

- a. the room is in good decorative order and no action is to be taken
- b. the room is in poor decorative order and an allowance will be payable to the incoming tenant.
- c. the room is in very poor decorative order and it should be decorated prior to viewing.

4. Ordering repairs

4.1 Unless the property is ready for immediate occupation, Southwark repairs will be asked to arrange for the gas supply to be capped off and a certificate provided to the office that this has been carried out.

4.2 A specification of repairs will be ordered immediately to FPMG's most competent repairs contractor(s). This will always include an electrical check. The aim will be to ensure that repairs are completed within a week of ordering or, if significant redecoration or asbestos removal is required, within two weeks.

4.3 The Treasurer will be advised where works costing more than £700 (ex VAT) are to be carried out and the expenditure will be authorised and reported in accordance with the financial procedures, with the exception that it will not normally be possible to obtain more than one quote. An order will be approved where, on the recommendation of the Estate Manager and the Treasurer, reasonable value for money will be achieved.

4.4 Upon letting the council repairs team will be asked to recommission the gas supply, unless the incoming tenant advises that they have no plans to have a gas supply.

5. Cleaning

When repairs and any redecoration have been completed, the estate cleaning company will be asked to carry out a full clean of the property.

6. Allocation and viewing

6.1 As soon as the property has been inspected and assuming that it will not need very time-consuming work, the council's allocations team will be advised by means of the standard proforma.

6.2 Once the council notifies the Estate Manager of the three successful bidders, the Estate Manager will contact the bidders to check that they are interested and fully informed about the estate and the role of the TMO.

6.3 The Estate Manager will email the Management Committee and ask for two or three volunteers to agree to form an interview panel and invite up to three of the bidders to a meeting. If the first bidder is very enthusiastic the other bidders will not be invited unless the first bidder changes their mind. Bidders will be shown around the property and interviewed by the sub-committee if they are wishing to accept the offer. The bidders will be considered in order. If the first applicant rejects the offer or is rejected by the sub-committee the property will be offered to the next applicant and so on. If necessary a second sub-committee meeting and viewing date will be set up.

6.4 The successful applicant will be invited to attend a sign-up interview with the Estate Manager at a mutually convenient later date

7. Key targets

- Inspection within 48 hours of return of keys or lock change
- Works ordered on the same day as the inspection
- Works completed by contractor(s) within one week (two weeks if significant decorative, asbestos removal or similar work to be carried out)
- Initial viewing appointment within one week of completion of work
- Average void period less than 28 days