

SP17 - Empty Properties Policy

1. Scope of Policy

The policy applies to all Soha properties that become vacant. It covers the services provided by Soha Group staff and its Contractors.

2. Aims of Policy

Soha aims to provide an efficient and customer focused voids (or empty properties) service that offers value for money and which operates in accordance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Regulatory Framework for Social Housing 2015 and the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.

Soha aims to provide homes to new residents that meet their needs and are clean, safe, and secure, in good condition, with services in working order.

Soha aims to keep properties vacant for the minimum period possible. This minimises rent loss and helps with meeting the local housing need. Soha aims to complete void work to a high standard and in the shortest timescale possible

Soha aims to apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate on grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter which may cause a person to be treated with injustice. Contractors carrying out work to vacant properties are expected to adhere to Soha's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy & Policy.

3. Policy Statement

Soha is committed to the provision of an excellent voids service to ensure the satisfaction of both outgoing and incoming residents.

All vacant properties we retain will be brought up to Soha's minimum void standard and void cleaning standard. These standards will be well publicised and reviewed by tenants at least every five years.

Performance of staff and contractors will be monitored to ensure value for money is being achieved, empty homes are re-let as quickly as possible and tenant satisfaction remains high.

4. Implementation

Soha has procedures that set out our approach for dealing with the termination of a tenancy.

Soha publishes the repair obligations of both Soha and its tenants in the Tenancy Agreement, on the website and in Soha leaflets. This includes providing information about our empty properties in different language formats as required.

Soha has a minimum void standard and a cleaning standard, which are developed and agreed with tenants. All voids are brought up to these agreed standards prior to letting. The standards set out that all void properties are to be clean, safe, secure, in good condition with services (e.g. gas, electric, water) in working order when handed over to a new tenant.

Soha voids are classified as either 'Major' or 'Minor' voids depending on the volume and nature of work required in the property.

If a void meets one or more of the following criteria the Director of Property Services, or another Soha Director in their absence, will consider whether the property should be retained or sold:

- The void is deemed to be a high value property.
- The void requires significant financial investment to bring it up to Soha's minimum void standard.

- The void has a low SAP energy rating.
- There is low demand for the void.
- The void has potential for redevelopment.

As part of the review process the Director will consult with the Lettings and Void teams and consider factors such as a property's value, cost of any work required, SAP rating, demand, repair history, previous ASB complaints etc.

The Empty Properties Procedure will provide full details of the Director approval process to be followed should the Director decide the property should be sold.

Soha will recharge outgoing tenants, in accordance with Soha's Income Recovery Policy, for any neglect or wilful damage caused to a property including garage, garden and outbuildings. Soha will also recharge tenants for rubbish left in the property, if rooms are left in poor decorative order, or for unauthorised work.

Soha will offer a financial incentive to residents who leave their homes in good condition, with a clear rent account and allow inspection to take place during their notice period.

Voids will be let in accordance with Soha's lettings policy. Any new void standards or processes that are introduced will be assessed to ensure they are customer focused and offer good value for money.

Decoration vouchers are issued to incoming residents to assist with decorating their new homes. Soha will in some circumstances decorate areas or rooms in poor condition i.e. if the incoming tenant is elderly, vulnerable or disabled or has small children and no family support to do so.

Every void is inspected prior to letting to make sure work has been completed to a high standard and the property is clean, safe, secure with services in good working condition.

Any resident wishing to complain about any aspect of the void process can lodge a formal complaint in accordance with Soha's complaints policy.

5. Development voids

Soha will explore options for occupancy for schemes awaiting closure, due to for instance planning permission timescales. This may include offering short term tenancies to residents or exploring 'guardianship' options to secure the property and address short term housing need.

6. Resident Involvement

Soha involves residents in setting and monitoring void service standards, selecting Contractors and monitoring Contractor performance.

Soha surveys its residents at various stages of the void process and uses the feedback to help shape and improve the service and reports to the Members' Forum on performance.

7. Monitoring/Responsibility

The Director of Property Services is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy. It will be reviewed every three years or sooner if required.

Void key performance indicators (KPIs) measure performance against targets. Soha is committed to ensuring that void work is procured and carried out in a way that achieves good value for money.

Void key performance indicators are monitored by staff weekly and are included as part of the monthly management report which is distributed to members of Soha's Senior Leadership Team. The management report is circulated to Board Members on a quarterly basis.

8. Context

SS04 Asset Management Strategy

SP01 Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

SP03 Lettings Policy

SP05 Repairs and Maintenance Policy

SP07 Complaints Policy

SP08 Sundry Income Recovery Policy

Empty Properties Procedure 2022

Members' Forum Approved	N/A	SLT Approved	16 April 2025
EIA Completed	N/A	Review Date	By Feb 2028
DPIA checklist completed	N/A		