



VOID PROPERTIES POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 It is the policy of Almond Housing Association Limited (AHA Ltd.) to:

- re-let vacant (void) properties as quickly as possible, and
- minimise the loss of rental income as a result of properties being empty,

subject to:

- the properties meeting AHA Ltd.'s Letting Standards (see Appendix 1), and
- the offers of tenancy being consistent with the Allocations Policy.

1.2 To assist in minimising void times, tenants will be reminded regularly, e.g. via the '*Almond View*' and the website, that in accordance with their tenancy agreement they should give 4 weeks (28 days) notice of their intention to terminate their tenancy.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Board of Management

- To ensure that there is in place a Void Properties policy which complies with current regulations, guidance and good practice, and meets AHA Ltd.'s requirements.
- To approve AHA Ltd.'s Letting Standards, monitor void letting times and consider any matters relating to void properties that require a Board decision.

2.2 Management

- Heads of Housing & Asset Management: Responsible for implementing the policy on a day-to-day basis, advising the Board, other Heads of Section and all employees as required on specific matters.

2.3 Employees

- To ensure they have read and understood the policy and supporting procedures, and to implement these as required in the course of their work.

3.0 VOIDS TARGETS

3.1 Reports on the following will be submitted as part of the reporting process to the Board and Senior Management Team:

- percentage of lettable houses that become vacant each quarter;
- the average time taken to re-let properties;
- the average rent loss per property for relet properties.

4.0 LETTINGS

4.1 All lettings will be made in accordance with AHA Ltd.'s Allocations Policy and the detailed procedures supporting that policy.

5.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 The procedures supporting this policy will include measures to mitigate the risks relating to the management of void properties, as listed in the current Risk Map.

6.0 PROCEDURES

6.1 This policy is supported by the following procedures:

- Absconds (Abandoned Properties)
- Assignment (Transfer)
- Decoration Allowances
- Decree for Possession & Eviction
- Mutual Exchange
- Rechargeable Repairs
- Storage of Furniture
- Termination of Tenancy
- Void Properties

7.0 REVIEW

7.1 The Head of Housing Management will ensure that the Board of Management reviews this policy at least every five years.

FIRST APPROVED IN	NOVEMBER 1995
CURRENT VERSION 5.0 APPROVED IN	NOVEMBER 2016
NEXT REVIEW DUE BY	NOVEMBER 2021

APPENDIX 1**LETTING STANDARDS**

Almond Housing Association Limited will aim to achieve these standards for every void property before it is occupied by a new tenant. The incoming tenant will be given a checklist based on this list to confirm the checks and work that have been carried out.

This list covers standard void properties. A separate list covers mutual exchange properties, recognising the fact that while we aim to achieve the same standards, there will not be the same time period when the property will be empty to enable full checks and/or remedial work to be carried out.

GENERAL ITEMS**1.0 Cleanliness**

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 1.1 the house is cleared of furniture, carpets and belongings/rubbish from the previous tenant
- 1.2 depending on their condition, curtains or blinds left by the former tenant are left as a security measure and/or for possible use by the new tenant
- 1.3 floors are swept and washed if required
- 1.4 kitchen and bathroom surfaces are washed down including tiled areas, bath panels and unit fronts
- 1.5 attics, cellars and out buildings are emptied
- 1.6 the property is presented clean and in a 'move in standard'.

2.0 Repairs

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 2.1 all repairs relating to these standards are carried out before the new tenancy (apart from circumstances outwith our control)
- 2.2 in exceptional circumstances where we are not able to carry out a repair, for example due to a delay in the delivery of a replacement internal door, and with the agreement of the new tenant, we complete the repair as soon as possible after the start of the new tenancy.

3.0 Alterations & improvements

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 3.1 any alterations & improvements carried out by the previous tenant have either been approved by us and are to be left, or, if they have not been approved by us, that they are removed and the property is re-instated with the costs being charged to the former tenant.

EXTERNAL ITEMS

4.0 Garden areas

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 4.1 gardens attached to the property are cleared of rubbish and any sheds left by former tenants that are in poor condition are removed (with the costs charged to the former tenant)
- 4.2 during the growing season, if required, the grass is cut as a 'one off' at the start of the tenancy
- 4.3 where required, gardens are brought up to a reasonable standard, e.g. overgrown bushes and trees are pruned or removed, excessive slabbing is removed etc.

5.0 Brickwork, external walls

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 5.1 external walls are sound so as to prevent the likelihood of water penetration
- 5.2 there are no major defects.

6.0 Roofs, gutters & downpipes (visual inspection from ground level)

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 6.1 roofs are weatherproof with no missing or slipped tiles/slates
- 6.2 all existing flashing is in position and secure
- 6.3 pointing is secure to ridge/hip/verges and eaves and is sufficient to ensure tiles etc. do not move or allow water ingress
- 6.4 gutters and downpipes are clear of rubbish, sound and secure.

7.0 Footpaths, ramps, external steps & handrails, driveways

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 7.1 any such items to the front and rear entrances are reasonably smooth, free of tripping hazards and sound.

8.0 Fencing, gates

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 8.1 boundary fencing and gates provided by us are in reasonably sound condition and free from defects that may cause injury (subject to agreement with adjacent owners where responsibility for boundary fencing is shared)
- 8.2 fencing installed by a former tenant that is in good condition is left and the new tenant is advised that maintenance is their responsibility, but where the fencing is in poor condition it is removed and the boundary reinstated to the original standard (with the costs charged to the former tenant).

9.0 Front and back doors

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 9.1 doors are securely hung and opening/closing freely
- 9.2 there is a letterbox and back flap on all front doors
- 9.3 we check for draughts, and for evidence of water ingress
- 9.4 where there are both mortice and yale locks only one of them is changed, but where there is only one lock it is automatically changed (mortice locks will be a minimum 5 lever for insurance standard)
- 9.5 we check on security and that spy holes and chains, where provided, are working.

10.0 Windows

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 10.1 all windows are fully operational, with sashes opening and closing freely
- 10.2 all windows are secure and checked for safety
- 10.3 window frames are sound and serviceable until the next cyclical painting programme
- 10.4 there is no cracked glazing, and any major failing to double glazing seals is replaced
- 10.5 ground floor windows are fitted with keyed locks as standard
- 10.6 where window locks are fitted, window keys are supplied or, if keys are missing, locks are replaced (with costs charged to the former tenant).

INTERNAL ITEMS

11.0 Electrics

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 11.1 all electrical fittings (including light fittings left by the former tenant that are not being removed) and fixed appliances (e.g. showers) are checked and a certificate of inspection issued to the new tenant (copy to be held by us)
- 11.2 where tests cannot be carried out because there is no supply, they are completed within 1 working day of Almond being informed that the supply has been re-connected
- 11.3 any switches or socket outlets that are badly marked, covered by paint, smoke affected or damaged in any other way are replaced (costs charged to the former tenant)
- 11.4 where provided by us, TV aerial points are in position.

12.0 Gas

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 12.1 all houses with a gas supply have an appropriate void safety check
- 12.2 a full gas safety check is undertaken and a compliance certificate is issued to the new tenant (copy to be held by ourselves)
- 12.3 where tests cannot be carried out because there is no supply, they are carried out within 1 working day of Almond being informed that the supply has been re-connected
- 12.4 where there is no gas supply during the void period, any supply pipes, e.g. for gas cookers, are sealed, and the new tenant is advised to contact us to have the pipe unsealed by a gas engineer, and the installation tested and commissioned
- 12.5 the CO detector is included in the safety check.

13.0 Gas/electric cooking

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 13.1 where the previous tenant has left a gas or electric cooker it is removed, as we will be unable to certify its safety.

14.0 Smoke alarm/carbon monoxide (CO) detector

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 14.1 the smoke alarm(s) is/are tested as part of the electric safety check and that, where required, a new battery is fitted
- 14.2 the carbon monoxide detector (where fitted) is tested and where required a new battery is fitted.

15.0 Water supply, waste pipes

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 15.1 stopcocks and valves are free and in working order
- 15.2 taps are free and not dripping
- 15.3 between October and April, during severe cold spells, we assess whether stopcocks should be shut off and the water supply drained down
- 15.4 we replace any adaptors that have been fitted to drainage systems for domestic appliances, e.g. dish washing machines
- 15.5 immersion heaters, where fitted, are in working order and the switch clearly labelled
- 15.6 cold water tanks have a fitted lid.

16.0 Insulation

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 16.1 there is a minimum of 100mm insulation quilt (or equivalent) in the attic roofspace, where appropriate
- 16.2 all hot water cylinders have a British Standard insulation jacket fitted, where they are not pre-lagged
- 16.3 all exposed or vulnerable pipe work, tanks and cisterns are lagged to minimise the risk of freezing.

17.0 Ventilation, air vents

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 17.1 mechanical extract fans, where fitted, are cleaned, and are in good working order.

18.0 Dampness

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 18.1 the property is free from damp due to water penetration or leaks
- 18.2 the property is free from evidence of significant condensation.

19.0 Internal pass doors

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 19.1 all pass doors are intact, securely hung and operating properly
- 19.2 bathroom and WC doors have a locking device which can be opened from the outside
- 19.3 ironmongery is replaced if unserviceable.

20.0 Floors

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 20.1 floors are secure and free from any tripping hazard
- 20.2 all loose and missing floorboards are re-secured or replaced, with no sign of active woodworm or rot
- 20.3 all floors are de-nailed and carpet backing removed
- 20.4 laminate flooring is removed in upper floor flats (costs charged to the former tenant)
- 20.5 laminate flooring in other properties that is not up to our standards is removed (costs charged to the former tenant)
- 20.5 non-slip flooring is whole, clean & free of paint splashes
- 20.6 floorboards are tested for excessive creaking and adjusted as required
- 20.7 where thermoplastic tiles are used as a floor surface, any loose or crumbling tiles are replaced, though not necessarily with an exact colour match (cracked tiles will be left).

21.0 Stairs

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 21.1 stair treads & risers are secure
- 21.2 banisters and handrails are secure
- 21.3 there is no sign of active woodworm or rot.

22.0 Skirtings, facings

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 22.1 missing or badly damaged skirtings or facings are replaced or, if it is possible to repair them, that they are re-secured and filled where necessary
- 22.2 skirtings and facings are in sound condition.

23.0 Internal walls & ceilings

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 23.1 plasterwork is free from major defect and is suitable for decoration after reasonable preparation by the new tenant - with no loose plaster, a reasonably level surface and with no cracks greater than 3mm wide
- 23.2 any holes greater than 50mm in diameter are filled in and left flush for decoration
- 23.3 any polystyrene tiles are removed, the plasterwork is made good and the area either redecorated or a decoration allowance is given to the new tenant
- 23.4 wall surfaces are free from textured coating (Artex)
- 23.5 defective textured coating on ceilings is repaired, as close to the original pattern as possible
- 23.6 any loose or defective joint taping is replaced.

24.0 Bedroom wardrobes & cupboards

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 24.1 any fitted wardrobes and cupboards have at least one level shelf
- 24.2 a clothes rail is fitted, where appropriate.

25.0 Kitchen units

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 25.1 all kitchen units are thoroughly checked, cleaned and fully functioning
- 25.2 defective door hinges are repaired, replaced or adjusted where necessary
- 25.3 damaged drawers and doors are repaired, or replaced, where possible with the closest match available
- 25.4 worktops damaged due to burning and/or water ingress are replaced where appropriate, and worktops are fully sealed
- 25.5 kick plates & trims are in place
- 25.6 wall cupboards are securely fixed
- 25.7 tumble dryers, where provided, are clean and functioning (but only if an electrical supply is available for testing).

26.0 Showers

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 26.1 any instantaneous electric shower is included in the electrical safety check
- 26.2 any electric shower is fully functioning (but only if there is an electrical supply available for the test)
- 26.3 the shower has a screen or shower rail
- 26.4 tiling, grout, and/or waterproof panelling is sound and sealed to the bath and shower tray.

27.0 Bathrooms

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 27.1 all sanitary ware, baths and basins are checked and are clean, free from rust, securely fixed, with all plugs in place, and free from major chips or cracks
- 27.2 taps are operating easily and not dripping
- 27.3 where replacement of part of a coloured suite is required, if the matching colour is not available the item is replaced in white
- 27.4 flushing mechanisms are working satisfactorily and PVC cisterns are replaced, if required
- 27.5 all existing tiling is sound and sealed
- 27.6 all joints to baths and shower trays are sound and in good condition
- 27.7 grab rails, toilet roll holders, cabinets & other fixtures and fittings are securely installed
- 27.8 boxing-in under wash-hand basins etc. is checked, and if in poor condition is removed and the area made good.

28.0 Decoration - general

AHA Ltd. will ensure that:

- 28.1 wallpaper is substantially unbroken and complete
- 28.2 woodwork is either varnished or painted, i.e. there is no bare woodwork
- 28.3 where the decoration is grubby and of poor quality, an appropriate decoration allowance is given (any assessment of condition taking no account of the suitability of the former tenant's colour choices).