



Void Management Policy

One Commissioning Organisation (OCO)

November 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

Voids are properties which are currently empty because a tenancy has ended and a new tenancy has not yet started. Voids may arise due to formal termination of a tenancy, abandonment of a tenancy, the tenant transferring to another tenancy, eviction of the tenant or the tenant's death.

As rent is not due on a void, this can represent a significant financial loss. This policy aims to keep loss to a minimum, whilst ensuring that a property is let to the right applicant as quickly as possible, following the appropriate allocations policy.

Bury Council aims to let every property to a tenant which is the best match for that property. However, on occasions, the council may hold a highly adapted property empty, until it is allocated to an applicant best matched.

This policy sets out an approach when dealing with void properties to ensure that Bury Council provides an efficient and customer focused service which:

- complies with regulatory and legislative requirements
- ensures value for money in repairing void properties and achieving re-let standard
- balances the need to minimise rent loss whilst letting empty properties to the right applicant and ensuring best use of the property
- maximises customer satisfaction in relation to the standard of their new home
- is consistent with the demand across the One Commissioning Organisation (OCO) of Bury Council.
- repurposes void properties to meet current demand and increase viability of letting a property.
- Stand down void properties that neither meet the priority needs of residents nor meet the 'Checklist of accommodation standards and tenancy-related housing services in supported housing' policy.

2. PRINCIPLES

This Policy will apply to all properties where there is a joint or part responsibility between Bury Council and Registered Providers.

It is underpinned by the following principles:

- Enabling inclusion in communities and decision making
- Equality of housing choice
- Enabling independent living in communities of choice for all Adult Social Care customers
- Openness and transparency in decision making
- Supporting priority needs of those people with adult social care needs
- Ensuring high standards and good quality accommodation
- Enables 'own front door' accommodation where possible

3. OBJECTIVES

This policy is designed to meet the following strategic objectives to:

- Continue to improve the quality and accessibility of our services, meeting people's needs at different stages of their lives
- Target investment effectively to maintain attractive, well-designed homes and places where people want to live
- Extend housing and tenure choice for all people who require specialised housing in Adult Social Care setting
- Demonstrate value for money and social impact
- Minimise the loss of rental income as a result of properties being empty
- Ensure that housing providers make the most effective use of their housing stock to let to the best matched applicant(s)
- Ensure that properties are brought up to a consistent and acceptable standard when let.

4. Letting a Void Property

The expectation is to ensure void properties/bedroom are allocated with complete consideration of customer needs, the property and the local area.

When a property becomes a void, the Provider must:

- Inform the Registered Provider and the Council immediately.
- Obtain final meter readings for all utilities (gas, electricity and water) and notify the relevant suppliers of them.

5. Selection of New Tenant(s)

To ensure that void rent loss is kept to a minimum, the process of selecting a new tenant for a property should begin as soon as possible after notice is received from the outgoing tenant or the Council is made aware that the property will be available for re-letting.

Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the processes of the Living Options Group (LOG).

If possible, a viewing for a prospective tenant should be undertaken prior to the outgoing tenant leaving the property, in order to minimise any delay in allocating the property.

If unfortunately, a void occurs due to the death of a tenant, then the Council must be informed so arrangements can be made sensitively.

6. Low Demand Properties

Some housing stock is more difficult to let due to low levels of demand for the property type or area. A property will be considered to be low demand if there are no suitable applicants for 3 months within the void period.

If after a period of 3 months, the property or bedroom is not re-let, the Council will consider standing down arrangements with Registered Providers for a particular property/bedroom. This is to avoid further costs and also encourage alternative provision to be sourced which is better quality and location.

There may be occasions where a bedroom is void but is not fit for purpose for the particular customer group who are living in the property. In such circumstances, the Council will liaise with the appropriate Housing Benefit departments to consider alternative arrangements to cover rental loss.

7. Void cost recovery

Even though best efforts will be undertaken to avoid void costs this may still occur. Bury Councils position is:

- The Housing Provider should offer a 6 to12-week void waiver in any 12 months of the calendar year per unit/ bedroom. Therefore, void costs would only begin after the agreed period. This is to enable suitable arrangements to be undertaken to identify appropriate tenants for the scheme.
- The Registered Provider will work closely with the Council to allocate within a 6 to12 week period. This is to allow time for Social Workers and the provider to discuss care plans and packages and identify appropriate tenants and applicants for schemes.
- After a 6 to12 week period, the Council will cover up to 50% of the rental loss due to voids with the Registered Provider.
- The Housing Provider will send an invoice for the void liability to the Registered Care Provider. The Registered Care Provider will then send an invoice for the Councils proportion to the Council.

All invoices for voids will be sent to the allocated Contracts Officer at the Council to review new and existing Service Level Agreements (SLA) will be reviewed to reflect this.

- All SLAs will be reviewed annually to ensure all regulations are abided to and reflect the principles of the Local Authority.
- On any new development (dependent on size and number of unit's) adequate time should be given to enable the safe and proactive staggered moving in of new tenants. This should be a minimum of 3 months and should be agreed between the Council, Registered Care Provider and the Housing Provider.

8. Quality and Performance

Monitoring and measuring performance levels of all voids across the housing stock will be monitored on a regular basis.

The Council will measure and evaluate performance against a range of appropriate and relevant performance indicators and will benchmark itself against other social housing providers and local authorities.