



**Date:** 24<sup>th</sup> October 2013

**Subject:** Voids

**Report Author:** R2R Resident Inspectors

**Purpose:** To provide findings and recommendations from residents scrutiny of the Voids process

## Introduction

The R2R panel decided on Voids as the third topic to be scrutinised by the panel. This report outlines the key findings from the scrutiny panel and provides a number of recommendations where the R2R resident inspectors feel that services could be improved.

## Methodology Used for the Scrutiny of Voids

The R2R resident inspectors decided that both a desktop review and scheme visits of SAHA's pre and post voids scheme inspection would be the best approach for reviewing the voids process.

### Pre and Post Voids Scheme Visits:

In order for the panel to get first hand experience of what a pre and post void property looks like, it was agreed that two panel members in the north and south would accompany a Housing Officer and Asset Manager to a pre and post voids inspection two weeks prior to a desktop review being conducted.

The panel members were also given a camcorder so that they could video the void accommodation at their visits. These videos are available in the Board members secure area of SAHA's website for viewing.

The R2R members and staff involved in the pre and post void inspections were:

- Jim Shearer - R2R member
- Valerie Hambelton – R2R member
- Steve Hickmott – R2R member
- Stuart Firth – Housing Officer
- Harriet Clamp – Housing Officer
- Dean Sitton – Asset Manager

The R2R members inspected the following properties:

<b>North:</b>	
<i>Pre Void:</i> 13 Caister Close – Skelmersdale	
<b>South:</b>	
<i>Pre Void:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flat 4, Morton Court – Maldon Essex</li><li>• 3 Edward Bright Close – Maldon Essex</li></ul>	<i>Post Void:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 Hazelwood Court – Maldon Essex</li><li>• 1 Cecil Mary House – Maldon Essex</li></ul>

The scrutiny meetings took place at SAHA's Head Office in London and Regional Office in Bolton on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

In order to gain a better understanding of the various elements involved in the voids process, the panel assessed and reviewed the following key documents:

The Association's:

- Voids Policy and Procedure.
- Pre and Post Voids Inspection Form.
- Termination Letter, Cleanliness Standard and Exit Survey.
- Pre and Post Voids Accommodation Inspections and Voids Cost Analysis Data.

- Decorating Allowance Policy and Decorating Packs.
- Lettable Standard (General Needs & Sheltered, Foyers & Agency Managed Services).
- KPI Statistical Information on Voids.

## Scrutiny findings

The R2R panel reviewed the following documents:

Voids Policy and Procedure: The R2R panel reviewed the voids policy and procedure to get a better understanding of the different processes involved.

The general feedback from the panel was that the policy and procedure were well written and thorough. The panel felt that SAHA is modern in its approach as the Association consults with residents on policies; this particular document has been reviewed within the last 3 years.

Positives:

- The wording in the policy and procedure is well written and simple for both staff and residents to understand, i.e. free from jargon.
- SAHA consults with residents (via the Customer Panel) on its policies to ensure residents understand the documents and have an input in formulating policy.

Negatives:

- The voids policy need to be more resident friendly/streamlined for residents into a 1-2 page summary version, removing the corporate objectives, loss of revenue, and empty properties paragraph.
- Panel members felt the voids procedure's key/abbreviations on the back page should be moved to either the glossary or front page of the document, as several of the panel members struggled with the abbreviations until they found it on the last page of the procedure.
- The voids policy and procedure needs to be reviewed and amended to reflect SAHA's new housing management system (Universal Housing – UH).

Recommendations:

- To create a resident-friendly/streamlined 1-2 page version of the voids policy and procedure for residents.
- To look at the use of "keys/abbreviations" and to place these in either the glossary or front page where people would read it.
- Amended voids policy and procedure to reflect the changes in SAHA's new housing management system (Universal Housing – UH).

Termination letter, Cleanliness Standard, Exit Survey and Pre and Post Voids Termination Inspection Form – The panel looked at documentation issued to residents when terminating their tenancy with the Association, i.e. termination letter, a copy of the Association's cleanliness standard and exit survey.

Termination Letter: The panel felt that the termination letter is pretty straight forward and easy to understand by all residents.

Positives:

- The termination letter issued to residents is a very good and simple explanation of how residents need to leave their property and what they need

to do before they leave, i.e. leave the property in a clean and tidy condition, removing furniture etc.

Negatives:

- None

Cleanliness Standard: The cleanliness standard is a good incentive for residents, however, the document needs to be amended as some of the standards are not realistic and more residents need to be encouraged to take up the incentive.

Positives:

- The cleanliness standard is a good incentive scheme as it encourages residents to leave the properties in a good state (however this is not always the case).

Negatives:

- The cleanliness standard needs to be reviewed/changed as some of the current standards are not realistic/unacceptable especially “remove finger or splash marks from kitchen and bathroom tiles, woodwork to have no dust or finger marks”.

Exit Survey: It was felt by the panel that an exit survey is a good communication tool used by the Association to get feedback from residents on its services, however, the panel felt that the exit survey should be linked to the cleanliness standard incentive as more residents are likely to fill it out, either before of after they move out.

Positives:

- The survey is easy to understand and simple to complete.

Negatives:

- None

Pre and Post Voids Termination Inspection Form – The panel felt the termination form was a good tool for the Association to use.

Positives:

- The pre and post voids termination inspection form is easy to understand.

Negatives:

- The form needs to be amended to include the staff member’s signature as currently only the resident leaving the property signs the pre and post voids termination form. The panel felt that this could be misused by staff.
- Residents leaving SAHA don’t receive a copy of the pre and post termination inspection form.

Recommendations:

- Re-name the Cleanliness Standard to “Cleanliness Guidelines”.
- Review the current cleanliness standard.
- The amount given out as part of the cleanliness standard/guidelines should be reviewed, i.e. increased, as more people are likely to respond and take up the incentive and this in turn will decrease the cost to the Association in relation to recharges.
- The exit survey should be attached as part of the £50.00 cleanliness standard/guidelines incentive.

- Exit surveys should be emailed to residents electronically, therefore ensuring more residents complete the survey.
- The pre and post termination inspection form needs a section where staff can sign the form.
- A copy of the pre and post termination information form is give to the resident at pre void inspection stage.

Pre and Post Voids Accommodation Inspections and Voids Cost Analysis: The panel had the opportunity to view a couple of pre and post void inspections. The overall view from the panel was that the videos were a very useful tool to have whilst conducting the voids scrutiny topic as this gave the panel a better understanding of how residents leave the accommodation.

The panel had a lengthy discussion and came up with a few suggested ways the Association could reduce its recharges costs, as currently the costs for recharges stand at £38,638 for the last 6 months and it only managed to collect £340.00 from former residents (less than 1%):

1. By looking at implementing regular property inspections every 15-18months. This allows staff to pick up on damages/recharges issues with residents before they leave the Association and would, hopefully, help reduce them.
2. By looking at profiling both residents and properties by conducting risk assessments and focusing on properties that would need more staff attention, i.e. vulnerable residents.
3. By looking at conducting a cost benefit analysis on recharges, and spotting trends in the number of most common recharges that reoccur and looking at ways to tackle these issues.

Positives:

- The video of the pre and post voids inspection was a good idea and gave the panel a view of what SAHA accommodation looks like when residents leave and what SAHA does to get the property back into a relettable condition.
- That SAHA benchmarks its services against the sector, as well as looking at best practice.

Negatives:

- The Association loses a considerable amount of money on recharges from former residents.

Recommendations:

- The panel would like to see pictures of Edward Bright Close once the property has been repaired as this property was left in a poor condition by the previous tenant.
- For SAHA to consider applying for dual benefits on empty/ready to let properties as this allows residents to be able to decorate their homes prior to moving and ensuring the Association doesn't lose money on an empty property thus reducing void costs.
- For SAHA to look at implementing regular property inspections every 15-18 months, as this allows staff to pick up on damages/recharges and tackle this issue with residents directly whilst they are a resident at SAHA.
- For SAHA to look at conducting a profiling exercise on both residents and properties to determine problem residents/properties and implement a course of action with individuals.

[Decorating Allowance Policy and Decorating Packs](#) - The panel looked at SAHA's decorating allowance policy and paint packs issued to residents as part of the voids scrutiny review.

The panel felt that the Decorating Allowance Policy was good, however a bit long, and needed to have a shorter version for residents. The panel also looked at the Decorating Packs (The Dulux Paint Packs) issued to new residents and the various documents associated with the packs from costs, sample of what's included in a decorating pack and satisfaction survey ([attached with this report](#))

The panel came up with an incentive scheme which will encourage residents to maintain and look after their accommodation. By looking at providing The Dulux Paint Packs as part of an incentive scheme:

- Where residents can either purchase the decorating pack by saving up for it, i.e. saving up a couple of pounds a month into a credit union bank account and contacting the Association once they have the funds to buy the decorating pack or
- If residents pay their rent for a year and don't incur any rent arrears, the Association could offer them a decorating pack as an incentive. Residents would be more likely to take pride in their accommodation and treat it with respect (less chance of properties incurring recharges/damages).

Positives:

- The policy is well written and simple for both staff and residents to understand, i.e. free from jargon.
- The decorating pack is a very good idea, and seems very convenient as the paint packs are delivered straight to your door. "This will change residents' mind set on how residents look at their accommodation and are more likely to look after it better".
- The Dulux paint pack is a positive scheme, better than the B&Q vouchers scheme.

Negatives:

- The decorating policy needs to be more resident friendly/streamlined for residents into a 1-2 page summary version of the document.
- The decorating policy needs to be amended to look at all "health needs", i.e. to incorporate residents with mental health as a health issue.
- To amend the decorating allowance policy to reflect the new Dulux Paint Packs.
- The ID required for The Dulux Paint Packs – not everyone has a passport or driving licence – is there a way of speaking to Dulux about the use of other forms of ID, i.e. tenancy agreement?

Recommendations:

- To create a resident-friendly/streamlined 1-2 page version of the decorating policy for residents.
- To amend the decorating policy to reflect the new Dulux Paint Packs scheme.
- The panel would like to see the equipment provided in the paint packs, i.e. paint brush, rollers/trays to see the quality of equipment provided (pictures or product codes is sufficient).
- To look at providing The Dulux Paint Packs as part of an incentive scheme where residents can either purchase the paint packs or, if a resident pays their rent for a year, offered as an incentive.

- The ID required for The Dulux Paint Packs – not everyone has a passport or driving licence – is there a way of speaking to Dulux about other forms of ID being allowed to be used, i.e. tenancy agreement??

Lettable Standard – The panel looked at the Association’s current lettable standards and were able to provide feedback on the new proposed lettable standard for both General Needs/Sheltered housing and Foyers/Agency Managed services.

Positives:

- New lettable standard seems thorough.
- It’s good to see that the Association benchmarks its services against other providers.

Negatives:

- None

Recommendations:

- To call the lettable standards “SAHA's Lettable Standards”.
- To keep both the General Needs/Sheltered and Foyers/Agency Managed services as 2 separate lettable standard documents.
- Fire procedure needs to be explained to residents within the General Needs and Sheltered housing schemes as a few of the panel members felt that not all residents know what do in the event of a fire, i.e. article in SAHA News.

KPI Statistical Information on Voids – The panel reviewed the Association’s KPIs on voids, re-let time and void rent loss, as well as against the sector through the Association’s Benchmarking source (Housemark).

Positives:

- Good source of information to have and know how the Association is performing against the sector.

Negatives:

- To know what the Association is doing to meet the Red KPIs.

Recommendations:

- The panel would like to be involved in setting the Association’s KPI targets in future.
- To have more information available as to what SAHA is doing to address any Red KPI figures.

**Recommendations:**

R2R inspectors recommend the following actions:

<u>Voids Policy and Procedure:</u>	
1	To create a resident-friendly/streamlined 1-2 page version of the voids policy and procedure for residents.
2	To look at the use of “keys/abbreviations” and to place these in either the glossary or front page where people would read it.
3	Amended voids policy and procedure to reflect the changes in SAHA’s new housing management system (Universal Housing – UH).
<u>Termination letter, Cleanliness Standard, Exit Survey and Pre and Post Voids Termination Inspection Form</u>	
1	Re-name the Cleanliness Standard to “Cleanliness Guidelines”.

2	Review the current cleanliness standard.
3	The amount given out as part of the cleanliness standard/guidelines should be reviewed, i.e. increased, as more people are likely to respond and take up the incentive and this in turn will decrease the cost to the Association in relation to recharges.
4	The exit survey should be attached as part of the £50.00 cleanliness standard/guidelines incentive.
5	Exit surveys should be emailed to residents electronically, therefore ensuring more residents complete the survey.
6	The pre and post termination inspection form needs a section where staff can sign the form.
7	A copy of the pre and post termination information form is give to the resident at pre void inspection stage.
<b>Pre and Post Voids Accommodation Inspections and Voids Cost Analysis</b>	
1	The panel would like to see pictures of Edward Bright Close once the property has been repaired as this property was left in a poor condition by the previous tenant.
2	For SAHA to consider applying for dual benefits on empty/ready to let properties as this allows residents to be able to decorate their homes prior to moving and ensuring the Association doesn't lose money on an empty property thus reducing void costs.
3	For SAHA to look at implementing regular property inspections every 15-18 months, as this allows staff to pick up on damages/recharges and tackle this issue with residents directly whilst they are a resident at SAHA.
4	For SAHA to look at conducting a profiling exercise on both residents and properties to determine problem residents/properties and implement a course of action with individuals.
<b>Decorating Allowance Policy and Decorating Packs</b>	
1	To create a resident-friendly/streamlined 1-2 page version of the decorating policy for residents.
2	To amended the decorating policy to reflect the new Dulux Paint Packs scheme.
3	The panel would like to see the equipment provided in the paint packs, i.e. paint brush, rollers/trays to see the quality of equipment provided (pictures or product codes is sufficient).
4	To look at providing The Dulux Paint Packs as part of an incentive scheme where residents can either purchase the paint packs or, if a resident pays their rent for a year, offered as an incentive.
5	The ID required for The Dulux Paint Packs – not everyone has a passport or driving licence – is there a way of speaking to Dulux about other forms of ID being allowed to be used, i.e. tenancy agreement??
<b>Lettable Standard</b>	
1	To call the lettable standards "SAHA's Lettable Standards".
2	To keep both the General Needs/Sheltered and Foyers/Agency Managed services as 2 separate lettable standard documents.
3	Fire procedure needs to be explained to residents within the General Needs and Sheltered housing schemes as a few of the panel members felt that not all residents know what do in the event of a fire, i.e. article in SAHA News.
<b>KPI Statistical Information on Voids</b>	
1	The panel would like to be involved in setting the Association's KPI targets in future.
2	To have more information available as to what SAHA is doing to address any Red KPI figures.