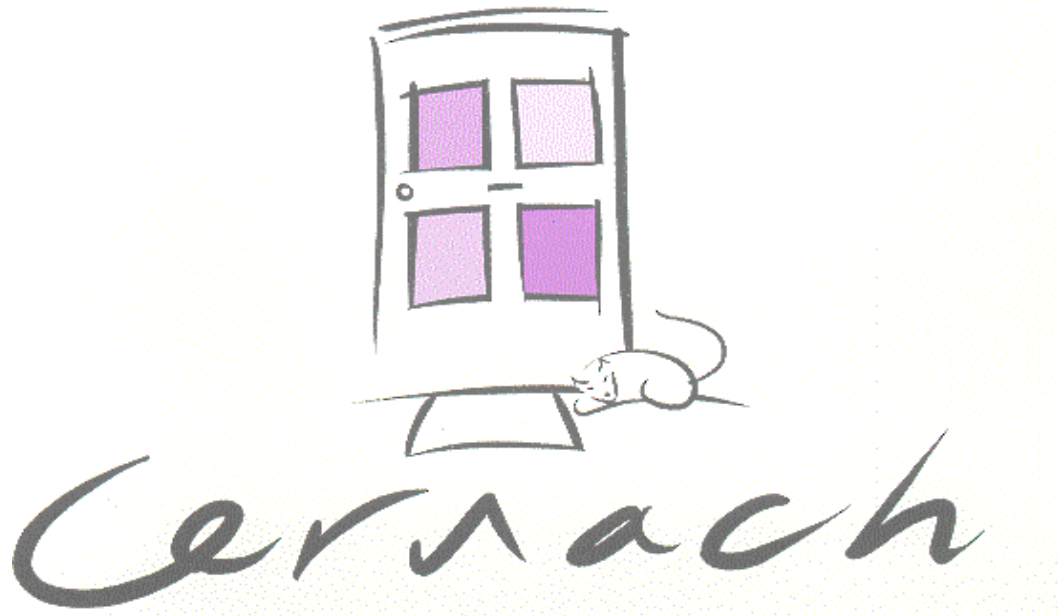


CERNACH HOUSING ASSOCIATION

LIMITED



Void Management Policy

Date Approved by Operations Sub Committee	3 August 2023
Date Issued to Staff	4 August 2023
Due for Review:	August 2026

Cernach Housing Association

Voids Management Policy



1. Introduction

- 1.1 Voids are properties which are empty and without tenants to pay rent for them. The turnover of housing stock is an integral part of social housing provision that inevitably results in periods where properties are void (empty). It is essential that there is effective management of void properties to ensure that Cernach Housing Association is maximising its income by minimising rent lost due to properties being empty and helping to create a stable community. Housing and Maintenance staff will work together to achieve efficient turnaround of any property becoming void. Our aim is to 'drop everything for a void'.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to outline how Cernach Housing Association will provide an efficient and customer driven void process. This is supported by a separate void management procedure which outlines the practical steps taken by the Association.
- 1.3 This policy aim is to ensure the Association minimises rent loss by re-letting void properties quickly and efficiently. Maximise opportunity to meet housing needs by allocating properties efficiently. To ensure accommodation offered is to the standard specified in the lettable standard and complies with health and safety. The policy reflects current good practice in void management by changing the emphasis from void inspection to pre-inspection and pre-allocations, to reduce void periods.
- 1.4 Void management activity covers a number of related activities. These include:
 - tenancy termination
 - property inspections
 - identifying rechargeable works and other tenant responsibilities
 - ordering and supervising repair work
 - offering tenancies and arranging viewings
 - creating tenancies, signing tenancy agreements and helping tenants sustain their new tenancy.
- 1.5 The Association has a statutory responsibility as a social landlord, under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and recognises the link between providing an inclusive, efficient and cost effective maintenance service and overall satisfaction, with the service provision of the organisation.
- 1.6 The policy will enable the Association to carry out its statutory responsibilities and meet our legal obligations as a social landlord. The primary aim of the void policy is to ensure that properties are allocated to meet acceptable standards and the Association makes the most effective use

of housing resources to meet housing need. Other aims include minimising rental loss, minimising the impact of void repairs, setting challenging targets for each stage of the voids process, ensuring tenants are aware of their responsibilities with regard to the condition of the property at tenancy termination and contribute to sustainable tenancies and sustainable communities.

- 1.7 The terms of the SST and SSST Agreement that are specific to the implementation of the void management policy are found in section “Ending the Tenancy”. Cernach’s staff will ensure that these terms are explained to tenants during the sign up process where a tenant expresses their wish to move on or transfer they will be given clear guidelines on their termination responsibilities.

2. Policy Aims and Objectives

The aims of this policy are to:

- to ensure that properties allocated by the Association meet acceptable standards
- to ensure that rent loss through vacant housing is minimised
- to ensure that the Association makes the most effective use of the housing resources available to it, to meet housing need.
- to ensure new tenants are satisfied with their new home
- increase tenancy sustainment
- ensure SDM is fully utilised to record all actions taken with regards void management.

3. Legislative and Regulatory Framework

- 3.1 The management of voids is undertaken to ensure the association lets its properties in a condition which meets the legal obligations detailed within the:
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, 2010, 2014
 - The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 and The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) (Amendment) Regulations 2018
 - The Energy Performance of Buildings (Scotland) regulation 2008
- 3.2 This policy takes account of current good practice and to the Scottish Government Social Housing Charter outcomes:
- Outcome 4: Quality of Housing.

Social landlords manage their businesses so that “tenants’ homes as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), And any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat Standard.

- Outcome 11: Tenancy Sustainment.

Tenants get the information they need on how to access support options to help them remain in their home and can get suitable support including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations”.

- Outcome 13: Value for Money.

Tenants, owners, and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other service charges they pay”.

4. Equality and Human Rights

- 4.1 The Association’s Equality and Human Rights policy, which was approved by the Committee in April 2021, outlines our commitment to promote a zero tolerance to unfair treatment or discrimination to any person or group of persons, particularly on the basis of any of the protected characteristics¹. This includes ensuring that everyone has equal access to information and services, and, to this end, the Association will make available a copy of this document in a range of alternative formats including large print, translated into another language or by data transferred to voice.
- 4.2 We are also aware of the potential for policies to inadvertently discriminate against an individual or group of individuals. To help tackle this and ensure that it does not occur, best practice suggests that organisations carry out Equality Impact Assessments to help identify any part of a policy that may be discriminatory so that this can be addressed (please see section 6 of the Equality and Human Rights policy for more information).
- 4.3 In line with section 6 of the Equality and Human Rights Policy, the Association carried out an Equality Impact Assessment on this policy and no remedial action was identified as necessary. The full assessment is appended at the end of this policy.

¹ The Equality Act 2010 identifies the “protected characteristics” as age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation.

5. Void Classification

Properties void at any one time can be broken into the following categories:

- a) Available for let – this means that the void property has had any re-let maintenance work completed and is available for occupation
- b) Under repair – although the tenant has vacated the property, the re-let maintenance work is still in progress.
- c) Held for decant – the void property is awaiting allocation as a decant flat in development programme
- d) Under development – the void property has either been handed over to a main contractor as part of the development programme or held for demolition.

6. Targets and Performance Monitoring

- 6.1 Within Cernach Housing Association's Business Plan there is an annual target set. This is to minimise the loss of income due to voids.
- 6.2 All voids work, which includes minimal repairs and standard safety checks up to letting by Housing Management expected to be complete with the target set, which is currently 5 working days.
- 6.3 Any void, which requires major type work i.e. fire damage or rot works. Timescales will be agreed with contractor prior to work authorisation.
- 6.4 All necessary repairs will be completed irrespective of cost in order to bring the property to the lettable standard.
- 6.5 On a monthly basis a performance report will be taken to the Operations Sub Committee meeting which outlines void management performance. This report will highlight the following:
 - a) Number of terminations (monthly and cumulative)
 - b) Number of re-lets (monthly and cumulative)
 - c) Void spend (monthly and cumulative)
 - d) Void spend profiled against budgeted yearly spend
 - e) Number of calendar days taken to let (monthly)
 - f) Number of calendar days taken to let (cumulative)
 - g) Monthly void loss
 - h) Year to date void loss
 - i) Number of settling in visits completed (monthly)
- 6.6 The Maintenance team and Housing Management team should have weekly

progress meetings to discuss the management of voids and consider which actions are working and areas where potential improvements can be made. The two teams will work closely to ensure effective communications to minimise void loss.

7. Notice of Termination of Tenancy

- 7.1 Under the terms of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement the tenant must give a least 28 days' notice to the Association of their intention to terminate their tenancy and they are liable to pay rent for this period even if they move out before then.
- 7.2 The Association has a 28 day termination of tenancy form to assist tenants with this process. We will accept 4 weeks written notification from tenants' to terminate their tenancy.
- 7.3 Legally if a tenant dies, the tenancy ends that on that date so there is no 'notice period'. The Association will allow relatives or friends a two week 'rent free' period to allow them to clear the property and hand back the keys.
- 7.4 If the Association believes a property has been abandoned the Association will follow the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 before terminating the tenancy.
- 7.5 On receipt of the termination of tenancy notice, the Housing Officer will send written confirmation of the termination of tenancy, outlining rent due to the date of leaving and the tenant's responsibilities for the termination of tenancy. The letter will also confirm the pre-termination inspection date and the tenant's final inspection date which is the day that keys are due.

8. Pre-Termination Inspections

- 8.1 A pre-termination inspection will be carried out on receipt of termination notice and within 3 days of receiving the notice. The Association is entitled as the landlord to gain access to the property to carry out an inspection. The initial visual inspection should determine if the property can be re-let immediately, in a few days or requires substantial remedial work. This subsequently will inform the void classification. The overriding aim is to achieve a quick let of an empty property.

- 8.2 This inspection is a check on the condition of the property and an opportunity to advise the outgoing tenant of their responsibilities in relation to terminating the tenancy, particularly regarding the standard of cleanliness the Association expects. Also to inform the tenant of rechargeable repairs. The tenant will be required to clear the property of all belongings. If cleaning costs are incurred this will be charged back to the departing tenant. A forwarding address will be obtained from the terminating tenant.
- 8.3 Tenants are required to make good any damage to the property that is due to misuse or neglect, even if this is not visible, as discussed at the pre-termination visit.
- 8.4 The Association may consider carrying out any required repair work in accordance with the principles set out in our rechargeable repair policy. The decision will be influenced by our aim to make best use of our housing stock.
- 8.4 Following the inspection, the Maintenance Team will advise the tenant in writing of any works that they require to carry out before the property is handed back to the Association. If possible, the Association will provide a cost for these works that could be recharged back to the tenant if they do not rectify before end of tenancy,
- 8.5 In recognition of the need to minimise re-let periods, the Association will undertake some repairs after allocation and the tenant has moved into the property. These will be agreed jointly by the Housing and Maintenance teams.
- 8.6 The following repairs are to be completed prior to re-let:
- a) All items essential to ensure the property is habitable in terms of health, safety and security including standard gas and electrical safety checks.
 - b) Repairs considered impractical to undertake in an occupied property e.g. major re-plastering, timber treatment.
 - c) Removal and replacement, where necessary, of substandard tenant alterations which are considered dangerous.
- 8.7 All other items may be completed after the tenant occupation.
- 8.8 Keys will be collected from the tenant at their final Inspection in which the Maintenance Officer and Housing Officer will be in attendance. It is the

Association's preference to collect the keys from the tenant at their final inspection, however we do realise that on some occasions keys may be returned directly to our office, in which case we will deal with the inspection as noted in Section 11. If keys are not returned on the termination date then the day of termination will be changed to the date the keys are received, this will also mean the tenant is charged to the date they keys are received.

- 8.9 In cases of a death and there is no succession, keys should be returned to the Association within 14 days of date of death.

9. Pre-Allocations

- 9.1 To minimise any void loss, the Association aims to pre-select an applicant for the void property as soon as possible, but within 3 days of the notice being received. The aim of this is to ensure efficient, effective and sustainable re-lets as soon as possible after the outgoing tenant terminates their tenancy.
- 9.2 We aim to visit all applicants prior to an offer of tenancy being made. Transfer applicants will be visited prior to an offer being made with the dual purpose of ensuring that the property is to an acceptable standard so as to allow the offer to be made. If required we will advise the tenant of necessary work to be done to allow an offer to proceed.

10. Minimum Void Standard

- 10.1 The Association has adopted a minimum standard for void property to ensure properties are of an acceptable standard at letting stage (See Appendix 1). It provides clarity to new tenants on the standard they should expect to receive their new home and what will be done before they move in. It also is designed to ensure a consistent standard of re-lets for tenants. Tenants will be advised of our minimum re-let standard at the accompanied viewing.
- 10.2 Internal decoration is, in accordance with the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement, the responsibility of the tenant. Outgoing tenants are expected to leave their home in a reasonable decorative state and we will recharge those who do not do so. However there are circumstances where this may not happen:
- if a tenant dies
 - abandons the property
 - is evicted

- If they are elderly or otherwise vulnerable and are unable to bring it up to standard.

11. Void Inspection and Work Authorisation

11.1 On the termination date of the void the tenant's final void inspection will be carried out by the Maintenance Officer and the Housing Officer or Housing Assistant on the day the keys are due in.

11.1.1 If keys are handed into the office, the void inspection should be carried out within one day of receiving the keys or access to the property to:

- a) ensure the property has been left clean and tidy
- b) make sure the property is safe and secure
- c) assess repairs in line with the re-let standard
- d) assess rechargeable repairs
- e) identify and assess the quality of any improvement and alterations carried out by our tenant and pay compensation, where applicable
- f) take final meter readings and arrange for card meters to be reset or removed

11.1.2 The keys will then be passed to the Maintenance Team who will organise the safety inspections (Gas and Electric) and required works gas.

11.2 The void inspection report (see **Appendix 2**) records the following information and dates:

- Pre termination inspection
- Keys handed in by tenant
- Passed to Maintenance Officer
- Void Inspection
- Meter details and readings
- Works order passed to Contractor
- Completion date
- Keys returned to Housing Management

11.3 The void inspection report also contains the following information:

- a) Work specification
- b) Gas safety inspection date
- c) Electrical safety inspection date
- d) Gas meter readings
- e) Electrical meter readings

- 11.4 The address of the void, date keys due in, status of void, e.g. under repair or with housing management for allocation, potential accompanied viewing and sign up dates should be marked on the dry wipe board.
- 11.5 The Maintenance Officer is responsible for monitoring the progress of all works and ensuring Housing Management are updated on progress.

12. Voids requiring Major Repair Works

- 12.1 Any void which requires major works will be notified to the Depute Director, or in their absence a member of the Management Team, prior to any void work being raised
- 12.2. When major work voids are authorised by the Depute Director or a member of the Management Team in their absence, this will be specifically monitored at the weekly joint team meeting. The Senior Maintenance Officer and Senior Housing Officer will be required to ensure that a full and detailed update is given.
- 12.3 All voids are post inspected by the Maintenance Team. No prospective tenant should sign up for a new tenancy unless the property has been checked and passed as lettable with copies of the gas and electric certificates.

13. Accompanied Viewings

- 13.1 Once an applicant has a pre allocation home visit and is at the stage where an informal offer can be made, an accompanied viewing should be immediately arranged. If the house is still occupied, the existing tenant should be contacted to arrange a suitable time for a viewing.
- 13.2 As this is the initial contact with a prospective new tenant, it is vital that they receive quality information and advice. This is important so the prospective new tenant has the information to make an informed decision. They should be fully aware of their rights and responsibilities, in particular, the importance of paying rent. This is a critical stage in developing a positive relationship between the Housing Officer and new tenant.

14. Decoration Allowance

In some circumstances, particularly where the empty property is of a less popular house type or address, we will decorate a property by emulsions the walls in neutral colours. Alternatively, we will offer decoration vouchers to new tenants. The purpose of this is to ensure that void times are kept to a minimum and new tenant satisfaction is achieved. This allowance is intended to assist in meeting the cost of redecoration and is not intended to cover them in full.

15. Sign-up of Tenancy Agreement

Once the date of entry has been established, the new tenant should visit the office to sign their tenancy agreement. Staff should use the checklist to ensure the new tenant has all the necessary advice, information and support to support them having a successful and sustainable tenancy. Once the tenancy is signed the Association will follow up this process with a letter to welcome the tenant to their new home.

16. New Tenant Visits

All new tenants should be visited by the Housing Officer within 6 weeks of their tenancy start date. This visit is to make sure the tenant has moved into the property and identify any support issues they may have. We also ask as part of this visit how satisfied new tenants are with their new home. We can use this feedback to monitor and review our services.

17. Customer Satisfaction

The Association is committed to a high level of customer satisfaction, seeking continuous improvement. The Association will carry out an independent tenant satisfaction survey every three years, which will include questions on void management issues, will obtain feedback regarding new tenant satisfaction at new tenant visits, monitor comments and complaints from tenants and service user and analyse the refusals of offers.

18. Complaints

The Association has a published Complaints policy & procedure, which can be used where there is dissatisfaction with this policy or the operation of this policy. Any tenant who feels aggrieved by their treatment under this policy can ask for a copy of the Association's complaints policy, which is available at the Association's office and on the website www.cernachha.co.uk. As with all our service policies, the complaints policy can be made available in large print, translated or on tape. Tenants also have the right to complain to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

19. Staff Training

Cernach recognises that it is extremely important that the resourcing and training of staff is adequate to meet all the needs of its tenants. The Association is committed to making training relating to effective void management available to staff. Training should be updated as appropriate. Staff will be encouraged to network with other RSLs in order to share best practice in dealing with void management.

20. Policy Review and Tenant Consultation

The Association has developed this policy in consultation with tenants, the tenant participation group, the tenants on the consultation register and account taken of representations made.

The Association will publish a summary of this policy in our newsletters and it will be made available on the Association website.

The Operations Sub-Committee and the Management Committee will review the Voids Management Policy every three years. This review will be brought forward if there is a need to respond to new legislation and/or policy guidance.

Cernach Housing Association

Voids Management Policy



Appendix 1 Minimum Lettable Standard for Void Properties

Works	Minimum Standard
General Cleanliness	The house will be cleared of furniture, carpets and belongings/ rubbish from the previous tenant. Floors should be swept out, kitchen and bathrooms surfaces to be washed down. Lofts should be emptied. Any graffiti on walls/doors should be removed and/or painted over. Any gas or electric cookers shall be removed.
Garden Areas	Landscape Maintenance Contractor shall be instructed to clear the rubbish from gardens attached to the property and if necessary, carry out a first cut of the garden grass.
Electrics	All electrics must be checked and a certificate of inspection copied to house file. Obvious alterations to the electric system carried out by the existing tenant are to be removed, unless compliance certificate covers these. The smoke alarm(s) should be tested as part of the electric safety check.
Gas	All houses with gas central heating to have a full gas safety check undertaken and compliance certificate issued to new tenant, copy to gas safety file. The gas bayonet fitting should be capped. It is the in-coming tenants responsibility to arrange for un-capping and re- fitting of their cooker by a qualified gas fitter.
Water Supply	During the months October - April or during severe cold spells, consideration to be paid to whether stopcocks should be shut off and the water supply drained down.
Works	Minimum Standard
Windows	All windows should be fully operational and checked for safety. Window keys should be issued to tenants where we have fitted locks.
Front Door	Locks changed and doors checked for security, draughts and water ingress.
Back Door	Locks changed and doors checked for security, draughts and water ingress.
Internal Pass Doors	All pass doors should be intact and operating properly, with appropriate handles. Glass doors should be removed and replaced. Bathroom doors should have locking device.
Floors	All loose and missing floorboards to be re-secured/ replaced.
Skirtings and facings	Missing or badly damaged skirtings/facings to be replaced. If possible to repair - should be re-secured and filled where necessary.

**Cernach Housing Association
 Voids Management Policy (Cont'd)**



Kitchen Units	All kitchen units to be thoroughly checked and hinges and handles replaced/adjusted where necessary. Damaged drawers and doors should be replaced, where possible. Chipped and damaged worktops should be replaced where appropriate.
Medical Adaptations	All medical adaptations should be inspected to ensure that they are fully operational.
Bathroom Suite	Bathroom suite should be checked for chips/cracks. The location of the chips or cracks will determine whether replacement/repair is necessary. Any blemishes should be recorded on house file at start of tenancy.
Shower Unit	Any electric shower, which has NOT been approved or fitted by the Association, should be removed. Tiles on shower wall should be removed and wall re-plastered as necessary. Where shower has been installed by the Association, this should be checked as part of the electrical safety check and shower screen checked/replaced as necessary. Where shower has been installed by a tenant as an authorised alteration and it would appear to be in good condition and have a notional lifespan remaining in excess of three years this should be checked as part of the electrical safety check and the shower screen checked/replaced as necessary.
Decoration	The Association is generally not responsible for the condition/level of decoration in a property. However, where the condition of the decoration is deemed to be so bad as to affect the likelihood of anyone accepting the property, then a member of the Management Team should inspect and authorise any decoration required.
Damp/Mould	A full inspection will be carried out by maintenance officer to determine any damp, mould or condensation issues. Follow up works will be carried out to rectify any of these issues.
Ventilation	An inspection on all current ventilation systems will be carried out and repair/replacements carried out as required

**Appendix 2 Voids Inspection Form
 CERNACH HOUSING ASSOCIATION
 VOID INSPECTION REPORT**

Address			
Date Keys Received		Date of Pre-termination inspection	
Date passed to Main Officer		Date of Void inspection	
Location	Description of Works		
Kitchen			
Hall			
Living Room			
Kitchen			
Bathroom			
Bed 1			
Bed 2			
External			

**Cernach Housing Association
 Voids Management Policy (Cont'd)**



Void Check List : Below items to be checked

Item	Check	Comments
Ventilation	Ventilation Present: Y N Location : Service Requires: Y N Job Number:	
Gas	Void Gas Service line issued: Y N Job Number:	
Electrical	Void EICR Line Issues Y N Job Number:	
Fire Safety	Smoke Alarms Installed to current standard: Y N	
Asbestos	Artex present within property: Y N Asbestos Test Requires: Y N Job Number:	
Damp/Mould/ Condensation	Confirm all rooms checked: Y N Follow on works required: Y N Job Number:	Details to be added on damp/mould/condensation issues

Inspected by: _____
 Inspected by: _____
 Date Inspected: _____

Signature: _____
 Signature: _____

Void Completion / Inspection:

	Completion Date	Inspected by	Comments	Further Action ?
Void Works				
Gas Certificate				
Electrical Certificate				

Inspected by: _____

Signature: _____

Date Inspected: _____

Date Passed to Housing Management Team for relet: _____



Cernach Housing Association Equality Impact Assessment Tool	
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Name of the policy / proposal to be assessed	Void Management Policy	Is this a new policy / proposal or a revision?	Revision
Person(s) responsible for the assessment	Laura Cuthbertson		
1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy / proposal	The aim of this policy is to ensure the Association is letting properties to an acceptable standard and minimising void loss. In doing this the Association should make effective use of housing resources to meet housing need, increase tenancy sustainment and ensure tenants are satisfied with their new home.		
2. Who is intended to benefit from the policy / proposal? (e.g. applicants, tenants, staff, contractors)	Applicants, Tenants and Sharing Owners		

**Cernach Housing Association
 Voids Management Policy (Cont'd)**



<p>3. What outcomes are wanted from this policy / proposal ? (e.g. the benefits to customers)</p>	<p>Minimise void loss and positively engage with applicants, tenants, and sharing owners</p>
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<p>4. Which protected characteristics could be affected by the proposal? (tick all that apply)</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Age X Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage & Civil Partnership <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy/Maternity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Race </p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Religion or Belief <input type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Reassignment <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Orientation </p>

5. If the policy / proposal is not relevant to any of the **protected characteristics listed in part 4, state why and end the process here.**


While policy actions such as rent charges, arrear actions and recovery apply equally, there are some impacts upon groups which apply generally when communicating with our tenants and residents.

	Positive impact(s)	Negative impact(s)
<p>6. Describe the likely positive or negative impact(s) the policy / proposal could have on the groups identified in part 4</p>		<p>People of any race, but different nationalities may disproportionately be affected by any communication or language barriers which would affect the style of void management actions.</p> <p>Disabled people could be disproportionately affected by any visual communication needs such as visual impairment. Disabled people also may have mental health</p>

**Cernach Housing Association
 Voids Management Policy (Cont'd)**



		<p>conditions which could limit their ability to manage correspondence in the same way as abled people.</p>
<p>7. What actions are required to address the impacts arising from this assessment? <i>(This might include; collecting additional data, putting monitoring in place, specific actions to mitigate negative impacts).</i></p>	<p>All staff have been trained in equalities and communication styles required for different groups. Due regard will be given for all arrear cases where language or disability could be a factor in managing accounts and the policy reflects this.</p>	

Signed:  (Job title): Senior Housing Officer

Date the Equality Impact Assessment was completed: 26/06/2023

Please attach the completed document as an appendix to your policy / proposal report