

BELGRAVE NEIGHBOURHOOD CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING ASSOCIATION ABANDONED PROPERTIES POLICY

Aims of the abandoned properties policy

The following are aims of the abandoned properties policy:

- To ensure that the co-op deals effectively with properties that have been abandoned or stand empty due to an expired notice, eviction or member deaths where there are no next of kin
- the co-op is protected from inadvertently taking unlawful possession of a property.

Delegated Authority

- 1 The co-op delegates authority to its senior housing lead to operate the abandoned properties policy, reporting to the committee on any significant actions needed in relation to abandoned properties.

Dealing with abandoned properties

- 2 There is a need for the co-op to have an effective approach to dealing with abandoned or empty properties, but the approach needs to ensure that the co-op is protected from inadvertently taking unlawful possession of a property and that tenant security of tenure is safeguarded.
- 3 At tenancy sign up, and subsequently where appropriate, the co-op will ensure that members are aware that:
 - they are required to occupy their home or room as their only and principal home
 - they are required to give 4 weeks' notice to end their tenancy
 - they should give vacant possession at the end of the tenancy.
- 4 The co-op will respond promptly where reports from other co-op members, rising rent arrears, no response to communications, forwarding address enquiries or other issues suggest that a property may have been abandoned.

- 5 The co-op will arrange to secure a suspected abandoned property on the same day a report is received.
- 6 The co-op will carry out enquiries to establish if the member intends to return to the property by:
 - attempting to make contact with the member through any known contact phone number or e-mail address
 - discussing with other local residents if they know whether the member intends to return
 - attempting to contact utilities companies to enquire as to whether services to the property have been disconnected or transferred
 - seeking to make contact with any known family, friends or employer of the tenant to try to establish if the tenant intends to return to the property, their forwarding address and contact number.
- 7 If contact is made with the member, and they intend to surrender their tenancy, the senior housing lead will seek to get the member to confirm this in writing. If the member intends to return to the property, the senior housing lead will explain the need for the member to use the property as their only or principal home.
- 8 The co-op will take possession of the property where it is clear that the member does not intend to return and the tenancy has been surrendered. Where it is unclear whether a tenancy has been surrendered, the co-op will issue a Notice to Quit and take legal action to repossess the property. The senior housing lead may also issue a Notice to Quit where it is considered that the member is not using the property as their only or principal home.
- 9 If the Senior Housing Lead believes there to be squatters or unauthorised occupiers living in the property, they should follow the Unauthorised Occupiers Policy in addition to this policy.
- 10 Where a sole tenant dies, the co-op will make contact with the next of kin regarding the member's belongings. Where there are no known next of kin, the co-op will make reasonable enquiries to establish whether the member made a will and will engage with beneficiaries regarding the member's belongings.

- 11 The co-op will usually arrange for member belongings left in a property due to abandonment, eviction or death to be held in storage for a period of up to 28 days. The senior housing lead will ensure that photographs are taken of belongings in the property and items remaining will be inventoried. If the belongings are not claimed within 28 days, the senior housing lead will arrange for any belongings of value to be sold and any other items to be disposed of.

Potential risks to be avoided

- A tenant is illegally evicted. Unlawfully depriving a tenant of their home is a criminal offence, which could result in the co-op and/or the officer taking the decision being prosecuted and the tenant taking a civil action.
- an abandoned property is squatted or illegally occupied because it has been left empty for too long.
- an abandoned property is damaged as a result of action not being taken soon enough to secure it.