

## STATEMENT OF INTENT

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that properties are re-let as quickly as possible and in accordance with our Lettable Standard for the benefit of incoming tenants and so that rent income is maximised.

The minimum re-let standard aims to help the Saffron Group (referred to hereafter as 'Saffron' or 'the Trust') to achieve a consistent level of work across all empty properties, and provide a standard which new tenants can expect when moving in.

The undertaking of any planned maintenance or improvement works will be considered on inspection.

### 1. PURPOSE

This policy is designed to set out Saffron's position and approach to the management of empty properties.

### 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Saffron will aim to keep rent losses arising from empty properties to no more than 1.0% of the total rent received and the proportion of homes vacant and available for letting to not more than 1.0% of the total properties in management.
- 2.2 Each year Saffron will review performance targets relating to the average time taken to relet properties (excluding unlettable properties as defined by CORE (Continuous Recording of lettings and sales in social housing in England))
- 2.3 Saffron will comply with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Regulatory Framework.
- 2.4 This policy should be read in conjunction with Saffron's Access to Housing policy.

### 3. EMPTY PROPERTY PROCESS

- 3.1 On receipt of Notice to terminate the tenancy, a letter will be sent to the tenant confirming the 4 week termination period. This letter also contains details of items that may be recharged to the tenant if these works are required, together with costs. Where this is possible the outgoing tenant will be advised of the costs at the time of inspection and given the opportunity to rectify any problems themselves, but at their own cost.

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- 3.2 An inspection of the property will usually be made within the first 7 calendar days of the termination period. Any repair or improvement works will be assessed and carried out promptly in accordance with the Lettable Standard. Following inspection the tenant / relative will be formally advised of works that are required to be carried out before the termination period ends.
- 3.3 Properties will be let in accordance with South Norfolk Council's Home Options Scheme or via allocation schemes operated by other local authorities and Saffron's Access to Housing Policy.
- 3.4 There are some properties which, because of their location, condition, type or size, may be hard to let (normally defined as those which have been offered and refused over three times or are likely to fall into this category) and Saffron may provide additional incentives to prospective tenants for these properties.
- 3.5 Accompanied viewings for prospective tenants will be undertaken and they will be advised of the works to be carried out in the property. After tenancy sign up the new tenant will be visited within 1 month of moving in to identify and follow up on any issues or concerns they may have.
- 3.6 Properties can be let under licence on any week day prior to the tenancy commencing on a Monday.

## 4. WORKS TO EMPTY PROPERTIES

- 4.1 All empty properties will be relet in accordance with the Lettable Standard attached as Appendix 1 to this policy.
- 4.2 Occasionally substantial improvement or repair works will be needed before an empty property is suitable for a new tenant or properties are held for a specific tenant to move into. These voids are deemed as "major works" and are defined by CORE as that which:
- are works which could not reasonably be carried out with a tenant in occupation, and which need to be carried out in a property while it is vacant. They involve remedial works that are necessary for the property to remain habitable; they would include structural repairs, site works and service installations.
- 4.3 A charge will be made to the outgoing tenant for any work carried out by Saffron to repair, replace, or remove tenants' own improvements.
- 4.4 Internal decoration will normally only be carried out by Saffron in Supported Housing properties.

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- 4.5 Tenants of General Needs properties will have the opportunity to order paint from a pre-selected range of colours at sign up to enable them to decorate the property themselves.
- 4.6 Tenants may be eligible for compensation when they leave a property if they have made certain, defined improvements to the property with Saffron's written agreement and to a specified standard. This will be on the basis of the Compensation for Tenants Improvements Scheme.

## 5. MONITORING

5.1 Saffron will regularly monitor the:

- total number of empty properties,
- rent loss due to empty properties,
- number of long term empty (unlettable) properties and reason,
- number of hard to let properties and their location,
- reasons for refusals of offers,
- average times for relet,
- the cost of repairs and improvements per property,
- average repair time in void properties,
- average time between property availability date and letting.

5.2 Performance indicators which will be collected for the Regulator of Social Housing are as follows:

- % of rent lost through dwellings becoming vacant,
- % of dwellings vacant and available for let at 31<sup>st</sup> March each year,
- % of dwellings vacant and unavailable for let at 31<sup>st</sup> March each year,
- average relet time for dwellings let in each financial year,
- % of lettings due to households leaving the HA sector,
- % of lettings to BME households.

5.3 Reporting will be carried out monthly through the Performance Reports and reported to each Management Team meeting. In addition performance will be reported to the Executive Team and Board on a quarterly basis.

## 6. CONSULTATION AND REVIEW

6.1 Saffron will consult with the local authority, community groups, recognised tenants/residents groups and groups of applicants on a regular basis to assess the effectiveness of this policy.

6.2 An ad hoc review may be triggered, for example in response to new legislation or RSH guidelines or when reviewing the efficiency or effectiveness of the service.

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## 7. MUTUAL EXCHANGES

### 7.1 Inspection

Tenants accept the condition of the property as they find it as part of the mutual exchange scheme. A number of inspections are carried out by Saffron in respect of mutual exchanges and these will include:

Electrical test  
Gas or Oil safety check  
Energy Performance Certificate survey  
Total Property Maintenance (TPM) Survey

The TPM survey will specify any repairs which are required to be carried out by the current tenant prior to the exchange taking place, such as damaged doors etc. Any structural defects affecting the property would also be noted and addressed as required.

When the current tenant has completed any repairs required, a further visit will be made to ensure that these are of a suitable standard. The exchange can be authorised only when all inspections are satisfactorily completed.

The new tenant is entitled to the repairs service provided as set out in the Tenancy Agreement and Saffron's Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

8. Saffron recognises that there may be circumstances where it will need and/or wish to take different or alternative action to that outlined in this Policy and it reserves the right to do so.

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|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Consulted with CAP</b> | 9 April 2018                 |
| <b>Board/Committee</b>    | Executive                    |
| <b>Date Approved</b>      | 23 April 2018                |
| <b>Review Date</b>        | March 2021                   |
| <b>Officer</b>            | Assistant Director (Housing) |
| <b>Version Number</b>     | 2                            |

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## APPENDIX 1

### LETTABLE STANDARD

#### 1. SUMMARY

1.1 Saffron will ensure that all empty properties are fit for occupation. The term “fit” being.

- Be structurally stable
- Be free of serious disrepair
- Having adequate provision for lighting, heating and ventilation
- Having satisfactory facilities for the preparation and cooking of food, including a sink with satisfactory supply of hot and cold water as set out further in this document.
- Having suitable washing facilities, including bath/shower, basin and W.C. with satisfactory supply of hot and cold water.

1.2 The following works will be carried out to every property before new tenants move in, (with the exception of the replacement of exterior door locks and removal of rubbish in the case of Mutual Exchanges);

- Safety checks (and remedial works if necessary) to electrical and, if appropriate, gas and oil systems.
- Replacing exterior door locks.
- The removal of rubbish.
- Provision of a current Energy Performance Certificate.

1.3 Essential improvement works (which may include those listed below) will be carried out prior to new tenancy commencement. If these items are deemed non essential they will be added to the current improvement programme and carried out after commencement of the new tenancy.

- Replacement windows
- New exterior doors
- Improved kitchen
- Improved bathroom
- Electrical upgrade
- Central heating upgrade

1.4 The examples of possible works below are guides to help Saffron reach consistent standards and to inform potential tenants about what to expect. The examples are neither exhaustive nor definitive and the actual works carried

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out, and the timing of these works, will always be dependent on the state of the property, the existing demand for the property and the needs and circumstances of the incoming tenant and those living permanently with them.

## **2. WORKS TO BE UNDERTAKEN / CONSIDERED BEFORE THE NEW TENANCY BEGINS**

### **2.1 CLEARANCE**

2.1.1 Saffron will remove all furniture and rubbish from the property (including the garden). Saffron will remove curtains unless doing so would adversely affect the security of the property whilst empty. Carpets will be removed at Saffron's discretion (which will depend on their condition and which will be advised to the tenant during the termination of tenancy inspection) unless they have been sold or given to the incoming tenant and Saffron has been made aware of this. A charge will be made to the outgoing tenant to recover all the costs incurred by Saffron in removing items from the property and disposing of them.

All empty properties will be cleaned on completion of repairs prior to new tenants moving in.

2.1.2 All gas and electrical appliances and fittings which are not owned by Saffron will be removed. This will be charged to the previous tenant.

2.1.3 All identified asbestos will be managed in accordance with current legislation and good practice. Asbestos out buildings will be removed regardless of condition.

### **2.2. ELECTRICAL AND GAS INSTALLATIONS**

2.2.1 All electrical appliances and systems will be inspected in accordance with current NICEIC regulations.

2.2.2 All gas appliances and systems will be inspected in accordance with current Gas Safe regulations and Saffron's Gas Safety policy. A copy of the inspection report will be provided to the incoming tenant.

### **2.3 CENTRAL HEATING SYSTEMS**

2.3.1 Heating systems will be drained if anticipated weather conditions make it prudent to do so.

2.3.2 If fuel is available oil fuelled heating systems will be inspected in accordance with current OFTEC regulations. If no fuel is available a visual inspection only will be made. The incoming tenant must arrange for delivery of oil to enable subsequent inspection and commissioning of the boiler.

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## 2.4 WATER SERVICES

- 2.4.1 Water pipes within the property will be inspected to ensure good operation and freedom from leaks. Any substantial lengths of “dead leg” pipework will be isolated and removed. Hot water temperature will also be taken.

## 2.5 SECURITY

- 2.5.1 All external doors to be checked to ensure that they are capable of being fully closed and secured. Door locks will be replaced with modern 5 lever security locks or equivalent and at least two keys for each new lock will be provided to the incoming tenant. All windows to be checked to ensure that they are capable of being fully closed and either latched or locked shut. Damaged panes of glass will be replaced.

## 2.6 FLOORS

- 2.6.1 Badly damaged or missing floor tiles will be replaced (but we cannot guarantee a colour match). Unsafe floor boards will be repaired or replaced
- 2.6.2 Where possible wooden floor boards will be treated to reduce the likelihood of wood worm.

## 2.7 KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS

- 2.7.1 All kitchens must have adequate facilities to enable the preparation and cooking of food, including space, power and plumbing connections for a washing machine wherever possible. A gas or electric cooker outlet will be provided, determined by existing installation. If space permits kitchens will be provided with at least two 1000mm base units (including a sink unit) and one 1000mm wall unit, plus at least one metre of worktop.

All bathrooms must have a bath or shower, a wash hand basin, and toilet. The toilet may be separate from the bathroom

Cracked wall tiles to bathroom / kitchen will be replaced to match existing if possible, otherwise white ceramic tiles to be used. All sanitary fittings will be free of cracks and will be cleaned. Toilet seats will be replaced

## 2.8 INTERNAL WALLS / CEILINGS / DECORATION

- 2.8.1 The dwelling must be in a condition capable of being readily decorated by the incoming tenant. Existing colours of walls/ceilings are not considered as making a property in poor decorative order. Existing wallpaper will not be removed.

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2.8.2 All plasterwork should be free from major defect and suitable for redecoration. Any substantial areas of defective or missing plaster will be replaced and made good. Only in exceptional circumstances will consideration be given to re-plastering rooms completely.

Any polystyrene ceiling tiles will be removed and existing ceiling board artexed ready for redecoration by tenant.

The removal of any picture frame hooks, nails, plugs, etc. and the making good of these holes are the responsibility of the new tenant.

Should any further defects become apparent whilst the new tenant redecorates, they should contact the Customer Contact Team at the earliest opportunity. There may be instances where we have advised on the inspection report that lining paper is not removed. In the event of this reinstatement of plaster will be the tenant's responsibility.

## 2.9 GARDENS

2.9.1 Saffron will cut back any substantially overgrown weeds, shrubs and grass.

2.9.2 Saffron will survey sheds, greenhouses and other structures in the garden and will remove such structure which is considered to be in a dangerous condition. The outgoing tenant will be charged for this work.

2.9.3 Saffron will repair any dangerous paths and driveways previously maintained by the Trust.

2.9.4 Where fencing is missing or the boundary is not clear, a post and wire boundary marker will be provided. Saffron do not provide panel or close boarded fencing.

## 3 TENANTS' IMPROVEMENTS

3.1 Tenants' own improvements should be removed and the property reinstated to its original condition by the outgoing tenant, unless they have been given written permission and the property is currently at the standard specified. A charge will be made to the outgoing tenant for any work required by Saffron to repair, replace or remove tenants' own improvements.

## 4. AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS



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- 4.1 Any adaptations made for disabled people will be retained for the benefit of future tenants provided they are in, or can be brought up to, a reasonable state of repair. Adapted shower rooms will not be removed and replaced with a bath for any new tenants unless a specific need is highlighted.