

Summary report

Review period December 2019

The Void Standard

Our role is to explore, examine and test Phoenix services on behalf of residents. We make recommendations to improve services and satisfaction.

We chose to investigate this topic because we wanted to find out more information on how voids are processed, and the types of repairs carried out in void properties to ensure that they are of an acceptable standard for new tenants.

How we carried out the review

We examined the service through a document review and requested key documents.

We interviewed the Strategic Asset Manager, Housing Managers and the Phoenix Repairs Service Technical Inspector.

Definition of: void

A void is an empty property that is usually waiting for some work to be done or for a resident to move in.

The scope for the review was:

To review the voids process and investigate the reasons for different turnaround times and the types of repairs carried out prior to letting.

To measure the success of the review we set out to understand:

- The different types of void.
- The types of repairs carried out in void (empty) properties and specification to which they are carried out.
- The reasons for different turnaround times.
- How to achieve the quickest possible turnaround time and understand the types of issues that can cause delays.
- Evidence of standard prior to letting.
- Value for Money with the voids process and the repairs carried out prior to letting.

Meet the panel

The panel is made up of five members. Welcome to Frank and Erica who observed our meetings.

Join us!

If you'd like to help put Phoenix under the microscope, improve services and satisfaction, please get in touch.



Eileen Davies



Karen Stokes



Gwen Smith



Deirdre Kennedy



Frank Osborn



Phoenix has a duty to provide safe accommodation. Before a new tenant moves in, Phoenix must ensure that the property is up to its 'letting standard.' This involves an inspection to the property to assess the level of work and essential repairs.

There are three types of void categories: long term, short term and purchase and repair.

£11,000
£1,000

The average short term costs (per void) ranges from £1000 - £11,000 depending on the level of work required.

There is no standard for a void property – each is judged on its own merit and therefore there may not be a consistent relet look and feel to Phoenix homes.



There is a Moving In - Letting Standard which gives a comprehensive list of what Phoenix's responsibilities are and those of the tenants. The document is very long and not user friendly which may explain why new tenants may be dissatisfied with the condition of the property at the time of letting.

Phoenix Repairs Service (PRS) carries out repairs in void properties. PRS tries to decorate kitchens and bathrooms before the void is let.



The Phoenix standard is above the government's decent homes standard.

Phoenix does not change baths to showers nor showers to baths in bathrooms, unless the tenant pays for the cost or if there are exceptional circumstances, for example as part of Aids and Adaptations.

All tenants visit the property before they sign the tenancy agreement.



Conclusion

There are several reasons which can cause different turnaround times with voids:

- The property requires major works e.g. structural, new kitchen or bathroom, specialised clearance/cleaning.
- The condition the property was left in by the outgoing tenant.
- How quickly the Housing Officer advertised the property with Homesearch.

To achieve the quickest possible turnaround time, there is a need to:

- Increase the number of pre-void inspections carried out at initial notification and at the end of the notice period to ensure that the property is clear.

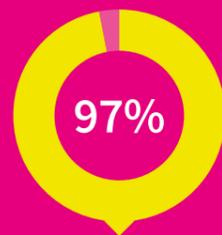
Value for Money is achieved by:

- Streamlining services to ensure voids are turned around quickly.
- Tenant satisfaction with their new home.
- Having a standardised specification for void properties.

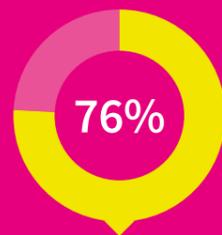
Resident satisfaction!

Overall satisfaction with the lettings process was 97%.

76% were satisfied with the overall condition of the property at the time of letting. The main issues affecting satisfaction were outstanding repairs, expectations were not realised, for example: tenants wanted carpets and bigger kitchens. Others wanted gardens that were landscaped. Some tenants wanted larger rooms within their property and wanted them fully decorated.



were satisfied with the overall lettings process.



were satisfied with condition of their property at the time of letting.



Our top recommendations

At the end of our review in December, we made eight recommendations which can be viewed in our full report. These are top five recommendations:

- 1 Develop a 'Client issued technical void standard' for Phoenix to provide to their contractors.
- 2 Review the Void Management policy.
- 3 Communicate to tenants at sign up that it is their responsibility to decorate and furnish their home and keep gardens in good and clear condition.
- 4 The Offer Letter needs to be updated to explain that the property is unfurnished and without floor coverings.
- 5 The Moving-In Lettings Standards should be updated to a checklist to make it more user-friendly.

Constraints

- The panel were unable to visit a void property due to Health & Safety issues.
- There are no guidelines for a void standard.

What we've learnt

- We found out about the different types of voids and the amount of money Phoenix spends on them to bring them up to a habitable standard.

1

Traffic light monitoring

To make sure that services are improved for residents, we monitor recommendations from our previous reviews to track when actions have been completed.

18

49

13 not started

We use a traffic light system to help us:

- red (delayed)
- amber (in progress)
- green (completed)

Phoenix and regulatory standards

At the core of every scrutiny review, we look to improve services for all residents in line with the Phoenix Standards and regulatory code set out by the Regulator of Social Housing.

In this review, we noted that there is not a specific Phoenix standard for voids, but Phoenix keeps the promises made under standard 3 (Lettings and Tenancy), Standard 4 (Rents) and Standard 7 (Financial Viability).

What's next

- We will look at how Phoenix assesses its activities for social value. Social value is the wider economic, social and environmental well-being benefits gained by the local community through better spending of public money.



The Phoenix Standards are available on the Phoenix website. If you require a hard copy, please get in touch with Phoenix.



More info

This is a summary version of our full report. If you'd like to read the full report, please call 0800 0285 700 or visit the Phoenix website.

Get in touch

W www.phoenixch.org.uk

T 0800 0285 700

E scrutiny@phoenixch.org.uk

Twitter [@phoenixtogether](https://twitter.com/phoenixtogether)

The Green Man, 355 Bromley Road, London SE6 2RP

