

Schedule 11

Void Standard.

Introduction:

This document is an amended version of the Trust's General Needs Void Standard which evolved following a consultation and review process completed during 2005.

Void Standard

A void is a property that is empty between one tenancy ending and another starting.

Agency-managed properties include rooms in shared properties, each of which will be subject to a separate occupancy agreement. This contrasts with self-contained dwellings, where the whole property is subject to one tenancy, though this may be held by one or more occupants forming a single household.

Action in the case of room voids

The inspection of room voids is in all cases an Agency responsibility, as is the undertaking of all void repairs and redecorations which are the tenant's responsibility as set out in Schedule 7. Agencies should refer to and follow the Room Void Inspection Checklist as shown in Schedule 13. Copies of all completed Room Void Inspection Checklists must be retained on file for inspection if required.

In the case of room voids in shared properties, the full void standard as set out below will be only partially applicable. It should serve as a guide to the expected standard within the vacated room, but will not apply to the rest of the dwelling, unless the whole property has become void at the same time.

Action in the case of self-contained dwelling voids

During this period, on Repair Option 1 the Trust will, following notification by the Agency, carry out a void inspection and will carry out repair works to ensure that the property meets our standards as set out below. If the Agent is on Repair Option 2, the Agent is responsible and must meet the same standards.

In general most void works should be carried out before the new tenancy starts. However, certain repairs can be left until after occupation as they may unnecessarily increase the turnaround times. There could also be works which will be incorporated into a forth-coming planned maintenance programme. If works are deferred, the details will be clearly explained to the incoming resident.

A minimum void standard has been set and subject to annual budget constraints will seek to meet the following:

- satisfy our residents
- meet Housing Corporation standards
- conform to the Planned Maintenance brief

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- meet the Design brief
- comply with building regulations, as appropriate
- ensure that the void time is kept to a minimum
- ensure that the number of our properties that are empty is within target
- meet the Decent Homes standard
- meet the Audit Commission 'Key Lines of Enquiry' for voids
- meet Scheme Development standards
- meet the new Housing Health and Safety Ratings System ¹ (HHSRS) which comes onto force in April 2006.

Following consultation and comparison with good practice the following minimum void standard has been produced. This standard will be reviewed on a regular basis. A copy of the minimum void standard is to be provided to all prospective new residents.

The Minimum Void Standard

Please note that in the following text all references to 'The responsible organisation' denote the organisation with contractual responsibility for undertaking void works in accordance with the terms of the management contract

1. General and health & safety issues

The responsible organisation will ensure that the condition of the property does not put at risk the health and safety of the future residents. In particular the responsible organisation will: -

- Ensure that all gas certificates and electricity supplies and appliances, where provided, are safe to use. Residents will be provided with the appropriate certificates.
- Where asbestos containing materials (ACMs) have been identified the resident will be advised of its presence and any precautions that they need to take.
- Ensure that the property is free from dampness and other visible structural defect that affects the safe occupation of the property.
- Provide all new residents with advice on dealing with or minimising, condensation.
- Provide standard details about their new home. e.g: where the cold water stopcock is located; details of the central heating programmer etc.

¹ HHSRS will replace the 1985 Act fitness standard as the basis of statutory enforcement action. The standard will now require homes to be free of category 1 hazards as defined in the HHSRS instead of the Fitness Standard. Further details to follow.

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- Where aids and adaptations have been previously provided, and they have been left for the new resident, these items will be subject to a safety check
- Where possible major new adaptations will be installed while the property is empty, subject to consultation with the Trust and the Local Authority Social Services department. However, where the consultation procedure will delay the resident moving into their new home, the resident will be consulted with a view to the resident moving into the property before the work is started. The adaptations works will then take place as soon as the consultation and approvals stage has been completed.
- During the winter period the plumbing installation will be drained down to reduce the risk of flooding from burst/frozen pipes.
- When a property becomes void net curtains will be fixed to prominent windows. Security shutters will only be installed where the risk of people breaking into the property is regarded as high by the responsible organisation.
- The property will be swept clean and all sanitary-ware, windows, kitchens sinks, worktops and kitchen cupboards will be cleaned. All other rubbish including household contents and appliances will be removed.

2. Walls, ceilings and decorations

2.1 Plaster

Any obvious blown plaster is to be hacked off and re-plastered. Any visible large cracks are to be raked out and filled.

2.2 Decorations

Decisions about redecoration should be made by the responsible organisation. The void will not be fully redecorated unless it is in very poor condition.

In all voids the kitchen, bathroom and /or toilet will be redecorated, unless they are in good condition. If the property has a staircase the hall, landing and staircase will be redecorated unless they are in good condition.

Polystyrene tiles and coving will be removed and the ceilings/walls made good, where necessary.

Consideration will be given to the redecoration of the communal hallway and entrance to the block, as appropriate. Consultation will be carried out between the Agent and the Trust to determine the extent of such works.

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2.3 Dampness and rot

The unit is to be left free from all forms of dampness. The surveyor is to check all ground floor walls with an electronic moisture meter to ensure the premises is free from rising damp.

Any condensation mould is to be washed off and sterilized with anti-fungicidal solution. If mould is still evident after treatment, it is to be painted over with an opaque sealer. A leaflet will be provided giving information about condensation.

If an incoming resident wishes to install a tumble drier, the resident must ensure that it is vented to the external air in accordance with the recommendations provided by the machine manufacturer. The cost of all works to correctly install the appliance will be met by the resident.

3. Floors

3.1 Structure

All floorboards should be secured and free from excessive splits. All raised nail heads will be hammered down.

If the floorboards are bowing at the edges, they are to be covered over with hardboard ready to receive the floor covering. In the kitchen or bathroom plywood will be used.

3.2 Dampness/rot

Any form of wood rot/infestation is to be fully treated and repaired. The chemicals used will be water based. In all cases, treatment will comply with current health and safety regulations.

The property will be checked and where identified, treatment will be applied to eradicate fleas and other pests.

3.3 Surface

All carpets including underlay and gripper-rods should normally be removed from void properties. Any debris from the old floor coverings such as adhesive and underlay remnants is also to be removed.

On an exceptional basis, if the floor covering is in very good condition, it may be retained until the incoming resident has had the opportunity to choose whether or not to keep it, in discussion with the responsible organisation .

Where following the removal of gripper rods the floor tiles have been damaged and require replacing they will be replaced with the best match available or complementary pattern. In most circumstances the tiles will be damaged again when new carpets are fitted.

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Any cracked floor tiles should be replaced to match existing as near possible.

3.4 Laminate Floors

Laminate floors are increasingly causing neighbour nuisance due to the amount of noise generated by the hard surface, particularly in flats. There is also the problem with maintenance and reinstatement when the laminate flooring has to be lifted to provide access the floorboards below.

Laminate floors will be removed in flatted accommodation. However, by exception, in traditional housing, and where noise nuisance will not affect neighbours the flooring may be left if it is in very good condition and the responsible organisation agrees that it should remain. However, the incoming resident will be asked to accept full responsibility for the maintenance of the floor. If there are complaints about noise the resident will be required to remove the flooring.

If the responsible organisation has to lift the flooring for repairs the laminate floor will not be reinstated.

4. Internal Doors and screens

4.1 Joinery

All joinery is to be left in a sound condition. The responsible organisation is to ensure no items of joinery are missing (architraves, doors, floorboards etc.). The doors are to be fully operational and free from holes.

Stairs and handrails to be secure and sound. If banisters have been removed they will be reinstated.

Note: The fixings of balustrade and handrails (both internal, external and on balconies will be checked and the gaps between the railings will not exceed the current safety regulations (100mm sphere).

4.2 Ironmongery

Ease and adjust for easy opening and closing. All missing ironmongery will be replaced.

5. Kitchen

5.1 Units

The responsible organisation will seek to achieve the following number of units as a minimum:-

- 1000mm base unit with stainless sink top with drainer. Cross head/lever taps should be installed in preference to dome head.
- 1000mm floor base unit which incorporates a worktop. Doors to new units should open fully 180degrees, where practical.

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- 1000mm or two 500mm wall unit
- at least one drawer unit

The number of cupboard units should be appropriate to the number of persons living in the property. It is anticipated that the above standard will be achieved in the majority of properties. In larger kitchens consideration should be given to the provision of a further food/storage cupboard.

Where kitchens are large, additional worktops can be provided. However, additional floor or wall units will not be installed without consultation between the Agent and the Trust. Consideration should also be given to providing space for a washing machine and dishwasher.

The kitchen including worktops, cupboards, drawers and shelves should be left in a clean and sound condition. The doors and drawers should be fully operational.

The minimum benchmark standard for the supply of new kitchen units are those manufactured by Howden, 'Langley' or 'Greenwich' range or Magnet 'Bamburgh' range.

If a sink is replaced, the new sink will be stainless steel with a single drainer. Where appropriate, to the size of the property, consideration will be given to the installation of a single bowl with double drainer.

5.2 Layout

Where possible there should be space and plumbing for a washing machine.

There should also be space for a fridge. If there is a worktop above the fridge it should be a separate piece so that it can be easily removed to provide space for a fridge-freezer.

The ideal layout for a kitchen, to conform to the Housing Corporation Development Standard is:

worktop_ cooker_ worktop_ sink_ worktop.

The sequence should not be broken by doors, passages or tall units.

There should be a 500mm minimum clear worktop each side of the cooker. Wall units adjacent to the cooker should be set back a minimum of 100mm.

If the kitchen is small and the minimum number of units cannot be installed or the layout compromises safety or the Decent Homes Standard, the Agent will discuss further options with the Trust. This may include remodelling the kitchen, or consideration of the property for disposal.

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5.3 Resident choice

Where possible, and where kitchens are to be replaced, residents should be offered the choice of colour of worktops, wall tiles, floor covering and paint for walls. The details will be confirmed by the responsible organisation.

5.4 Cleaning

All cupboards, kitchen units, windows, shelves and surfaces including splashbacks should be thoroughly cleaned (inside and out) with hot soapy water. Rinsed with clean water and dried with a clean cloth

The worktops should be matching, clean and free from rot and excessive scratches.

5.5 Wall Tiles

Any cracked splashback wall tiles are to be replaced to match existing. All walls above work tops and sinks should have a minimum of two courses of splash back tiles (300mm high). The responsible organisation may provide additional tiles, for aesthetic reasons, to infill the wall space between the worktop and the wall unit above.

The silicone sealant around the sink unit, and at the junction between the worktops and walls/tiles, should be renewed where necessary.

5.6 Floor covering

Properties with timber floors will be provided with tiled or sheet vinyl floor coverings in the following rooms: Kitchen, bathroom/toilet. Where the property has solid floors (concrete) the following rooms will be provided with tiled or sheet vinyl floor coverings: Kitchen, bathroom/toilet, entrance hallway.

Tiled or vinyl floor covering should be used rather than leaving plain plywood.

5.7 Ventilation

Where necessary an extractor fan should be installed.

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5.8 Decent Homes Standard

The following information is provided to give guidance to surveyors regarding the application of the Decent Homes Standard.

To comply with the Decent Homes Standard the following should be checked to see whether the property conforms to the criteria which requires the property to have 'reasonably modern facilities and services'.

- The kitchen is reasonably modern (20 years old or less)
- The kitchen should have adequate space and layout. This would be one that was too small to contain all the required items (sink, cupboards, cooker space, worktops etc) appropriate to the size of the dwelling.

Note: There are six main criterion. If the property lacks three or more the property would be deemed not to meet the Decent Home standard.

5.9 Future kitchen replacement programmes

Where a programme of Decent Homes work is due within 18 months of reletting a kitchen will not automatically be replaced unless it is unhygienic. Repairs will be undertaken to extend the life of the units. Residents will be advised of the impending programme of works at the pre-let stage. The Trust will advise the Agent upon request of any planned replacement programmes.

6. Bathroom

6.1 Sanitary fittings

All sanitary ware is to be thoroughly cleaned with approved cleaning solutions to leave clean and free from any cracks.

The WC seat will be changed in every void. The WC pan is to be secured to the floor and chemically cleaned if necessary. It should be replaced if the condition is not satisfactory after cleaning. After cleaning the pan should be sealed with polythene and tape ready for the incoming resident.

Missing plugs and chains should be replaced.

Cross head/lever taps should be installed in preference to dome head.

White coloured fittings will be the standard. Where a replacement fitting is required to a coloured suite, the best matched replacement will be installed. Pressed steel baths will be installed.

Cleanliness and state of repair to take priority over colour co-ordination.

A toilet roll holder with new toilet roll will be provided.

Pull cord to light switches in bathrooms and toilets will be replaced.

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6.2 Wall tiles

Any cracked splashback wall tiles are to be replaced to match existing. All walls above bath and basins should have a minimum of two courses of splashback tiles (300mm high). A minimum of 4 rows of tiles will be provided around the bath. However, if an over-bath shower is installed the walls will be fully tiled from the top edge of the bath to the ceiling.

All joints around fittings and at the junction with walls and tiles should be renewed, where necessary, with an appropriate sealant.

6.3 Ventilation

Where necessary an extractor fan should be installed. Existing fans are to be cleaned.

6.4 Floor covering

Tiled or vinyl floor covering should be used rather than leaving plain plywood.

6.5 Decent Homes Standard

The following information is provided to give guidance, to surveyors, regarding the application of the Decent Homes Standard.

To comply with the Decent Homes Standard the following should be checked to see whether the property conforms to the criteria which requires the property to have 'reasonably modern facilities and services'.

- A bathroom which is 30 years old or less
- An appropriately located bathroom and WC. This would be one where the main bathroom or WC is located in a bedroom or accessed through a bedroom (unless the bedroom is not used or is for a single person). A dwelling would also fail if the main WC is external or located on a different floor to the nearest wash hand basin, or if a WC without a wash hand basin opens on to a kitchen in an inappropriate area, for example next to the food preparation area.

Note: There are six main criterion. If the property lacks three or more the property would be deemed not to meet the Decent Home standard.

6.6 Future bathroom replacement programmes

Where a programme of Decent Homes work is due within 18 months of reletting a bathroom will not automatically be replaced unless it is unhygienic. Repairs will be undertaken to extend the life of the fittings. Residents will be advised of the impending programme of works at the pre-let stage. The Trust will advise the Agent upon request of any planned replacement programmes.

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7. Electrics & Heating

7.1 Electrical safety and installation

During the initial inspection the gas and electric meters are to be turned off.

All voids should have a full electrical inspection carried out by a competent person or firm that is registered with an approved scheme operator and is able to self-certify that their work meets the requirements of Part P of the Building Regulations. On completion of the inspection the competent person will duly complete an Electrical Installation Certificate, which shall be modelled on those in BS 7671:2001 or as specified in Appendix B of the Part P.

Older properties must have adequate power points in the kitchen to meet today's demand. The **minimum** requirement will be:

- one cooker point, as appropriate.
- 2 double socket outlets
- 2 spurs for fridge and washing machine

A decision whether the property should be rewired will be taken following the electrical test. The property may be programmed for rewiring in the future. The incoming resident will be notified.

Each room will be fitted with an energy-saving light bulb.

For hygiene reasons the pull cord within the toilet/bathroom will be replaced.

7.2 Gas safety and heating installation

When a property becomes void the gas supply will be capped off.

When the new resident moves into the property a gas engineer will carry out the gas inspection within 24 hours.

The gas fired central heating system is to be checked by a CORGI registered gas engineer to ensure there are no problems with appliances or leaks. All heating services should be left free from leaks. A copy of the gas inspection certificate (CP12) will be left in the property.

Where there is no gas supply to the property i.e. the meter has been removed due to an outstanding debt, the installation should be capped off and the carcass tested and certificated.

Gas fires, which have been left by the previous resident, will be removed. Where a full central heating system has been installed the fireplace, where the gas fire has been removed, will be infilled, and a ventilator provided.

Other obsolete independent heaters, other than properly working gas fires, will be removed and the plasterwork made good.

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A modern central heating system will be installed, if not already provided. The system will ensure that heating is provided in all main rooms to achieve the following minimum room temperature standards.

Location	Design Temperature
<i>Living/Dining Room</i>	<i>21°C</i>
<i>Kitchens</i>	<i>18°C</i>
<i>Bedrooms</i>	<i>21°C</i>
<i>Bathrooms</i>	<i>22°C</i>
<i>Hall & Staircases (within dwellings)</i>	<i>18°C</i>
<i>WC's</i>	<i>18°C</i>

7.3 Water heating

Replace hot water cylinder jacket if required/applicable.

7.4 Fire detection and alarm

All battery powered smoke detector alarms in the unit will be removed.

A hard-wired smoke alarm (i.e. connected to the mains supply) will be installed in the property. In two storey and above properties an additional smoke alarm will be installed at each floor landing.

If a smoke detector alarm is mains connected it should be checked as part of the electric inspection.

Note: The smoke detector will be tested and cleaned, in future years, as part of the annual gas servicing contract.

Any fire doors must shut automatically/be self closing

7.5 Fire regulations

If the property does not comply with current standards then it should be reported to the Trust to discuss the best course of action. Polystyrene tiles will be removed and the surface prepared ready for decoration.

Where doors have been removed from kitchens these will be reinstated.

7.6 General

Facilities will be provided to enable the connection of either a gas cooker or electric cooker, subject to gas and electric supplies currently provided to the property.

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7.7 Open Fires

If a solid fuel system is to be retained or installed, the chimney will be swept by a specialist chimney sweep.

Solid fuel appliances will be subject to safety checks.

8. Plumbing

8.1 Pipework

The pipework and system should be in good order with no leaks. Minor leaks to be repaired.

All properties will have their full water system drained down if it is void during the winter period November to February. It will also be drained down if there are exceptional cold periods or the property will be empty more than 90 days.

During the winter season the stopcock is to be turned off.

A notice will be left in the kitchen for the incoming resident advising them that the water has been drained down and where the stopcock is located.

8.2 Fittings

All stopcocks and meters are to be labelled by the contractor and left fully operational.

All stopcocks and taps should be in proper working condition. If new sanitary fittings are installed the supplies to the fittings should have isolating valves to ease future maintenance.

Plumbing for a washing machine will be provided where there is space for a washing machine.

9. Basements

9.1 Access

All access to basements should be sealed over and left with an access hatch. Meters in the basement are to be moved, as appropriate.

9.2 Ventilation

A check should be made that all basements are sufficiently ventilated

10. Roofs

10.1 Structure

The roof and rainwater goods should be checked visually (with binoculars) to ensure they are in a sound condition.

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10.2 Roof space (loft)

The loft space is not designed for storage and any articles placed there will be cleared.

10.2 Gutters and rainwater goods

Unblock and ensure that guttering and rainwater pipes are watertight

10.3 Roof insulation

The roof space will be inspected to determine the current level of insulation provided. Details will be passed the Trust for the inclusion of the property in a future insulation top-up programme.

11. External walls

11.1 Structure

If there are signs of structural movement and/or subsidence, the responsible organisation should determine the extent and severity of the defects. Such defects should be reported to the the Trust who will pass the details of the property to the Trust's insurance team who will instruct a specialist engineer to carry out further detailed investigation. Any structural works will be carried out by the Trust in accordance with the engineer's recommendations in consultation with the Agent and the insurers.

Any tree saplings within 2 metres or abutting the main structure are to be removed.

11.2 Finishes

The external painting is to be in a reasonable condition. If the decorating is in a poor state then the Trust is to be notified to discuss the best course of action.

12. Windows and external doors

12.1 Ironmongery

All windows, fittings and locks should be fully operational. Suitable fasteners or stays should be fitted. Missing window lock keys will be replaced.

Ease and adjust for easy opening and closing.

Window restrictor stays should be fitted to all first floor windows and above to prevent accidental opening and falls from height.

12.2 Glazing

Glazing should be free from cracks

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Security glazing should be provided where required for impact resistance and below 800mm. Upgrading may be achieved with proprietary security film unless glass is being replaced for other reasons.

12.3 Security

Consideration should be given to installing window locks to any accessible windows particularly where the security risk is deemed as high by the responsible organisation.

The key barrel to the front door will be changed. If it is a 'Best' lock it is to be changed for a new lock. The benchmark standard for the type of lock to be fitted is a 'Ruko' lock. A mortice lock should also be added to the door to 'Secure by Design' standards. Note: Certain properties are fitted with special 'suited' locks these should be matched. Spare keys should be provided to the Agent so that they can carry out accompanied viewing.

If a mortice lock is on a communal door, on a means of escape route, it should be replaced with a thumbturn lock on the inside. A night latch (Yale lock) should also be added. Additional spare keys for communal doors should be provided where reasonably required

The dwelling is to be left in a secure condition at all times. If it is found to be unsecured during the initial inspection, i.e. broken windows/ damaged front door, repairs should be undertaken on an emergency basis.

If security screens and doors are used then all work on windows and doors should be arranged for the day the resident moves in. There should be no delay in removing the screens and carrying out any associated repairs. All ground floor front windows are to have net curtains installed within 24 hours if they are not already present.

12.4 Door entry systems

Where there are door entry systems to blocks of flats these will be in good working order.

13. Fencing, paving and gardens

13.1 Fencing

Broken fencing and gates are to be repaired by the responsible organisation. The minimum standard will be a 900mm high post and line fence.

Where a future planned maintenance programme is due within 18 months of reletting the fencing will not automatically be replaced unless it is unsafe. Repairs will be undertaken to extend the life of the fence. Residents will be advised of the impending programme of works at the pre-let stage. The Trust will advise the Agent upon request of any planned replacement programmes.

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13.2 Paths and paving

The paths should be left in a safe condition.

Other repairs to path, fences, steps, handrails etc. should be carried out to ensure that they do not provide a health and safety hazard.

13.3 Gardens

Gardens will be cleared of rubbish.

Over grown hedges and bushes will be cut back/strimmed. Grass will be trimmed to an acceptable length. The garden will not be levelled or prepared for planting etc. this will be the responsibility of the incoming resident.

The Trust wishes to be environmentally friendly and therefore the responsible organisation should retain ponds. However, the incoming resident must be advised of the dangers of ponds and the risk of drowning small children. In exceptional circumstances the responsible organisation may remove the pond. Efforts should be taken to remove any wildlife from the pond to a new home.

Any green houses, sheds or lean-to's will be removed. The incoming resident will be given the option to keep these but will be asked to take on responsibility for the maintenance of the structure.

14. Final housekeeping issues

14.1 Mail left in property

Any items of mail left in the property for the ex-resident or from service providers (gas/electricity etc) will be tidied and left in the property. The Agent will collect the old mail and forward to the previous resident.

14.2 Miscellaneous items

The void contractor will leave the following items within the property:

Air fresheners/ deodorisers (one for kitchen, bathroom/toilet, lounge; a pack of toilet rolls; spray surface cleaner; spray polish; spray glass polish, pack of cloths; pack of rubber gloves

The items are to be left at high level so that children will not have easy access to the products.

Energy saving light bulbs should also be provided or installed within the property.

15. Resident Improvements

Consideration will be given to retention of improvements carried out by the previous resident e.g. shower over bath, fitted kitchen, conservatory. These improvements will be 'gifted' to the incoming resident. The resident will be fully responsible for the future maintenance and replacement of the 'gifted' items.

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16. Disabled adaptations

General adaptations will be noted during the void inspection e.g. flush floor showers etc. Mechanical aids such as through floor lifts and stair lifts will be serviced and/or removed by the responsible organisation.

If Social Services have provided mechanical aids they should be offered back to the appropriate Local Authority and removed prior to reletting e.g. bath hoists.

17. Recharging

The Trust shall pass on the cost of any repair due to an act of deliberate damage or neglect by the Agent or the previous Occupant of the Property or their visitors, to the Agent.