

## **SECTION 1**

### **THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

#### **1.0 AIM OF THE LETTINGS POLICY**

"To build and sustain communities whilst contributing to meeting priority housing needs in the local area".

The organisation is committed to creating "Neighbourhoods of Choice" this objective relates to existing neighbourhoods we work in as well as new developments and Supported Housing. The way we allocate accommodation on our schemes has an impact and an influence on the communities we are working in. Our allocations policy must balance sustaining neighbourhoods of existing customers and meeting housing needs expressed by potential customers. This is a challenge for us.

To achieve this aim the organisation has adopted a three stream access route into our housing provision, rather than a more traditional approach of one route based on housing need.

#### **2.0 ACCESS STREAMS**

**2.1** To address the issue of social residualisation in our housing stock the organisation recognises that creating mixed communities is a way of tackling this. On new developments the organization aims to create alternative tenure options within one scheme. On existing schemes we can promote Home Buy options. More significantly we can use the allocations process to enable wider entry to our properties to create a more socially mixed group of customers.

**2.2** The allocations policy allows entry by the following streams:

- General
- Community
- Economic

## 2.2.1 General Stream

Gives access to those in housing need and it is controlled by a traditional points system:

Set out in the table below the points system

<i>Housing Need Indicator</i>	<i>Points</i>
Overcrowding:	
1st bedroom	15
Further Bedrooms	30
Under occupation per bedroom	5
Separated Households	25
Disability/Health/Medical	
- Minor	50
- Severe	
Dwelling Type	
- Children under 10 years above or below ground floor	10
Security of Tenure:	
- Priority Homeless	50
- Non-priority Homeless	
- Sleeping Rough	
- Move on from Preferred Partners/ Directly /Managed	50
Lacking Amenities:	
- Living Room	10
- Kitchen	10
- Bathroom/Shower	10
- Inside Toilet	10
- Hot Water Supply	10
Sharing Amenities:	
- Living Room	5
- Kitchen	5
- Bath/Shower	5
- Inside Toilet	5
- Hot Water Supply	0
Property Condition:	
- Need Major Repair	20
- Poor Condition	10
Pregnancy relating to overcrowding	15
Harassment/Nuisance	50

All points in the policy are accumulative so creating a wider more holistic picture of an applicants need.

Points for medical, homeless and harassment indicators will receive the highest single allocation of points. An applicant in a severely overcrowded, shared housing situation could, however, gain more points because of the accumulator effect. Enhanced recognition of shared and overcrowding housing situations is intentional.

To further help the recognition of severely overcrowded situations where families are living apart, points in respect of separated families are available.

Medical points are awarded at one rate on the basis that moving will or will not improve the applicant's lifestyle. To simplify the lettings process these points will be awarded without GP verification. Applicants are asked to describe how their current housing causes medical problems and how rehousing will improve or alleviate this condition.

One category of insecurity of tenure is available; this covers homelessness and insecurity of tenure.

An expectant mother is treated as two or more people dependant on number of children expected; overcrowding and shared points would be allocated accordingly. This would allow the applicant to be allocated a two bedroom or larger property, which recognises long term needs.

The highest pointed applicants would be interviewed for vacancies and allocations made accordingly.

### **2.2.2 Community Access Stream**

Research suggests that need based allocation policies create communities that are radically different to those found in the wider area. Most notably child density is

higher, benefit dependency is greater and the proportion of people in work is lower.

It is also recognised that giving customer's choice in where they live increases their satisfaction so they are more likely to stay and be part of the local community.

To address the issues of imbalance in communities and choice affecting turnover rates we have adopted a community access stream. This gives access to accommodation to people who want to move into the community for a variety of reasons, such as:

- long term family and extended family connections giving and receiving of support
- to be closer to a community which you are active in
- key or voluntary workers
- access to medical or other specific community support

Applicants are asked to detail in their application why they are choosing this area and to give details of their connections. Following up these details will form part of the verification process.

This access stream is also be used for transfers, HOMES and armed forces applicants. These applications would be dealt with in date order; any exception to this will have to be approved by the Neighbourhood Manager.

### **2.2.3 Economic Access Stream**

Is available for applicants who want to rent but have no housing need or community connection

Applicants to this stream would be dealt with in date order.

This stream is open to the following people who are:

- in employment who are outside the housing needs criteria
- with private income/savings that can afford to rent
- moving to take up employment, not necessarily key workers

The Access Stream model can be used in a number of situations.

- Market renting - use 100% economic access stream
- Regeneration Schemes - increase percentage of community lettings.
- 100% Nomination Rights/Common Housing Registers - 100% housing need may have to be retained if the agreement is not negotiable.

### 3.0 LOCAL LETTINGS PLANS

**3.1** The organisation must be proactive in the way it lets its property. Staff must make themselves aware of the issues within local areas and use this information to develop a local lettings plan. Local lettings plans must be developed for each scheme.

Generally the organisation lets its properties in the following ratios:

- 75% General Need
- 15% Community
- 10% Economic

**3.2** If an area needs to change the ratios to address issues within a scheme they would have to consult with partners and justify the changes through the Local Lettings Plan. Lettings plans should be used to address the following issues:

- Child density, the Page Report noted that the average child density in Great Britain is 21% but on new RSL developments he had noted rates of 67%.

- Age Profile of resident, e.g. within a sheltered scheme there could be a high number of very elderly residents, giving rise to higher needs/ demands on the SSO. This issue could be addressed by letting to more active people.
- Diversity of Households, research has suggested traditional allocation policies have led to the social residualisation of schemes. New lettings could be used to address this balance.
- Special needs ensure that supported housing clients are allocated move-on accommodation whilst ensuring that customers with support needs are not over represented and the ability to support their needs should be considered within schemes.
- Community Stability, greater attention should be paid to turnover rates on open schemes. Schemes with the highest turnover rates within an area should be studied. Reasons for residents leaving should be sought and action taken to tackle problems.
- Local Ethnic composition, ethnic mix within the groups stock should reflect the wider ethnic mix in which we are working.

**3.3** Customers should be involved in developing local lettings plans. They live within the local community so are able to identify issues that the lettings plan should tackle. Established tenant groups should be asked to contribute to this process.

In the event that local lettings plans are developed which differ from the normal lettings plan this should be subject to Head of Housing Services approval.

Local lettings plans that move away from the published steam targets of 75% General; 15% Community and 10% Economic should only be used in conjunction with other initiatives, for example action against anti-social behavior, innovative housing management tactics such as "super caretaker" and, where permissible, introductory tenancies.

Local lettings plans cannot be allowed in isolation as such limited action would not be effective. They must not be seen as the only solution to scheme problems.

Once local lettings plans are approved Area Teams will then let in accordance with the plan. Lettings will then be monitored in accordance with the plan; the plan would also enable staff to justify lettings, to applicants, the Housing Corporation, Audit Commission or the Ombudsman.

Local lettings plans will allow area teams to make more appropriate lettings decisions. Thought will now be given to the allocation process to ensure that any lettings made are sustainable. In order to let in accordance with the plan e.g. to reduce numbers of children, the highest pointed or the next date order applicant may not be offered the property. The decisions must be detailed as exceptional lettings are currently.

#### **4.0 VERIFICATION**

The application form highlights that the organisation will operate a verification procedure and all applicants will be asked to sign the form agreeing to the verification process. Refusal to give authorisation will result in the application being considered for rejection by the Head of Housing Services.

#### **5.0 REJECTION AND APPEALS PROCEDURE**

- 5.1** Where the organisation receives hearsay evidence about an applicant legal advice should be sought to find out whether such information can be considered when rejecting the applicant.
- 5.2** The Head of Housing Services/Support Manager will approve rejections. The Customer Appeals panel will deal with appeals in line with the organisations Complaints policy.

## **6.0 CUSTOMER CHOICE**

Research suggests that if a person exercises real choice in where they live they will be happier and stay longer

Applicants should not be penalised for refusing offers. In addition the applicant should be given a choice of size of accommodation. However, staff must ensure applicants understood the possible financial implications of exercising choice.

## **7.0 CLOSURE OF WAITING LISTS**

Where turnover is low and demand high Area Teams have the discretion to close waiting lists. This reduces the administration work, as such schemes are usually popular.

Closure of popular waiting lists also enable applicants to make more informed choices. Where applicants are accepted onto a list there is a clear expectation they will be rehoused. This gives rise to dissatisfaction when the organisation cannot fulfill the expectation promptly.

Applicants applying to closed lists should be given details of when the list will be reviewed again.

## **8.0 COMPATIBLE LETTINGS**

Area Teams should have the discretion to make compatible lettings to ensure that people who were to live in close proximity or share facilities should lead similar life-styles.

Turnover can increase if incompatible lettings are made. If sustainable communities are to be encouraged more stability within the Housing Stock will have to be encouraged.

## **9.0 ADAPTED AND WHEELCHAIR HOUSING**

- You can create a shortlist

## 10.0 DIVERSITY OF TENURE

To assist in the task of maintaining stable and balanced communities the Organisation is committed to diversifying tenure options for existing customers by promoting

- ◆ Right to Buy
- ◆ Release of Equity through Shared Ownership
- ◆ Places for People re-purchasing Shared Ownership options in the event of financial difficulties
- ◆ Home Buy
- ◆ Social Homebuy & Right to Acquire

## 11.0 APPLICANTS REJECTED ON GROUNDS OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Increasingly other landlords are excluding applicants from their lists, which is putting greater pressure on the organisation

The organisation can tackle this issue through the provision of a supported housing package in partnership with a statutory support agency, experienced in tackling social rather than housing problems and the tenant offered an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. Areas must check they have the required Housing Corporation approval to do so.

## 12.0 UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE

The organisations remains committed to housing young people between the ages of 16 to 18 years of age. The organisation recognises the legal difficulties involved in providing tenancies for under 18s and the policy reflects this. In addition, every applicant under 18 rehoused in general needs stock, with or without support, will be issued with an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. Areas must check they have approval from the Housing Corporation to use an assured shorthold tenancy.

When assessing applications from people in this age group we need to establish whether they have the necessary skills to live independently. Where support needs are identified the Association will offer advice and may, in certain cases be able to provide support directly.

All those under 18 receiving support will be required to make a written commitment to accepting the support for as long as is necessary.

Guidance is available for visiting officers to best enable them to establish whether a young person has the necessary skills for independent living with or without support.

All applicants under 18 years of age must provide the name of a person or organisation to act as a legal partner. Guidance and advice will be given to the young person to facilitate this.

## **13.0 SUPPORTED HOUSING**

This section of the policy relates mainly to applicants to the general stream who are either leaving supported housing and seeking accommodation within the general needs stock; or who may require some support once rehoused to help them manage their tenancy effectively.

### **13.1 Existing Arrangements at supported Housing Schemes**

Supported Housing Schemes are designed to meet specific needs so they are allocated according to the scheme's allocation policy and procedure.

*\* need to refer to individual scheme policy/procedures*

### **13.2 Move-on Accommodation**

We are required to take a strategic approach in its commitment to providing move-on accommodation from supported housing projects to general needs stock. Where a relationship exists with a project (either managed directly or by a "Preferred Partner") the appropriate HOMES manager/s will work with the preferred partner/s to establish a move-on agreement. This will enable individual applicants from these schemes to attract additional points.

Move-on Agreements will be reflected in the local Lettings Plans. The plan must balance the need to provide move-on accommodation with the need to ensure that supported tenancies are not over-represented in a locality.

### **13.3 Ability to Sustain a Tenancy**

The organisation has made a commitment to sustaining communities. However, we need to ensure that tenants with support needs are not over represented in the locality, particularly if their support needs are met.

When assessing applicants the organisation will seek to identify potentially vulnerable customers. Wherever possible we will provide support or seek support for the customer to enable them to successfully manage their tenancy.

Tenancies should only be offered to vulnerable customers where the support needs identified can be met and if the applicant is committed to accepting the necessary support

## **14.0 ALLOCATION PROCESS**

Allocations will be made in accordance with the allocations policy or Local Area Plan, which will detail the percentage of lettings that should be made to each stream.

When a vacancy occurs officers will decide which stream is to be used. They should also consider any other requirements detailed in the Area Plan, e.g. the plan might show that the child density on site is too high therefore the requirement could be for a smaller family unit. Such parameters can be input into the computer and a specific list created.

Normally the highest pointed general applicant will be offered the vacancy. Where the Community or Economic stream is being used applications will be dealt with in date order. The officers making the allocation must detail any exceptions to this policy.

## 15.0 NOMINATIONS

Local Authorities should be consulted on the proposed Area Lettings Plans. Their support will be crucial if the aims of the plan are to be realised.