One Housing

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Department	Customer Experience
Directorate	Operations
Policy Owner	Sandra Fawcett – Director of Customer Operations
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VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Author	Reason for New Version
1	October 2021	Andrea OCallaghan	First Issue, previously included in Lettings and Tenure Policy
1	December 2023	Andrea OCallaghan	Minor clarification on appeal

Contents

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1   PURPOSE

1.1   One Housing is committed to providing high quality and well managed rented homes that are allocated through a lettings service that is fair, transparent and efficient and ensures we make the best use of our housing stock and keep the time our homes are empty to a minimum.

1.2   We will work in partnership with local authorities to assist them to meet their statutory obligations to meet identified local housing need and increase choice and mobility for our existing tenants.

2   SCOPE

2.1   This policy is intended to set out our obligations to local authorities, to contribute to their housing function and sustainable communities. It applies to our general needs, affordable and intermediate rented homes and internal transfers for our supported housing. It does not cover market rented homes. There are a range of allocation and onboarding procedures that set out in more detail the intentions of the policy.

3   LEGISLATION, REGULATION, GUIDANCE AND BEST PRACTICE

3.1   The allocation of social housing is covered by the following legalisation and regulations.

Regulatory of Social Housing (RSH) Tenancy Standard as set out in the Regulatory Framework states that registered providers shall:

- Let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how their lettings:
  - o   Make the best use of available housing
  - o   Are compatible with the purpose of the housing
  - o   Contribute to local authorities' strategic housing functions and sustainable communities
  - o   Have a clear application, decision-making and appeals processes

Legalisation and guidance relating to the allocation of social housing, includes:

- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Right to Move and social housing allocations statutory guidance
- Allocations of accommodation guidance
- Local authority nomination agreements

We also participate in GLA or local authority schemes aimed at tackling homeless or housing need, including:

- Pan-London Housing Reciprocal
- Housing Moves
- The Clearing House
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA)

4   INTRODUCTION

4.1   This policy supports the following aims of the corporate plan to support people to live well. It applies to the letting of our empty social housing properties, both new build and relets, across our general needs housing stock.

- Delivery of the policy is supported by the Allocations and Onboarding team, as part of the Customer Experience department.

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- Properties are generally allocated to applicants on local authority housing registers, who have up to 75% nomination rights to relets and 100% nomination rights to new builds. The only exception to this is Tower Hamlets who has a Common Housing Register in place so receive 100% of properties for relet.
- Nomination agreements relate to true voids. These are all voids except those created by an existing tenant being moved to another One Housing property.
- All new lettings must be recorded in the CORE (continuous recording of lettings and sales in social housing) website. Lettings must also be recorded in the annual Statistical Data Return (SDR).
- We will ensure that adapted properties are, whenever possible occupied by those who can make the best use of these properties.
- We will normally look to maximise occupancy levels to make the best use of stock, though we may consider under occupying in some circumstances, including using local lettings plans.

5 LEADERSHIP, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY

5.1 Leadership and commitment

The Director of Customer Experience is committed to support the delivery of this policy through, people, systems, changes is regulation and sufficient allocation of resources.

5.2 Organisational Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Responsibility for the day-to-day operational management of the service lies with the Assistant Director – Customer Experience, supported by the Head of Allocations and Customer Onboarding.

5.2 The Allocations and Onboarding Manager and Onboarding Officers have responsibility for the delivery of the content of the policy. Ensuring properties are let within regulatory requirements, maximise the mobility of existing tenants and ensure all new customers receive an excellent first experience with One Housing.

6 OPERATION

6.1 Local authority nominations

6.1.1 Under the terms set out in local authority agreements a percentage of all general needs homes must be offered to each authority's housing department. This percentage will normally be 100% for all new builds and no more than 75% of relets of family sized homes and at least 50% of one-bedroom homes.

6.1.2 Allocations to nominated applicants will be subject to the local authority's own Allocations and Letting Policy, Letting Schemes and local lettings plans. Each nomination will be subject to assessment and we reserve the right to refuse a nomination if the nominated household is subject to the exclusion list for our own tenants or in the case of a vulnerable person there is not an appropriate support package in place.

6.1.3 If a local authority is unable to provide an applicant within the terms of the nomination agreement, One Housing reserves the right to withdraw the property and allocate it to an existing resident or offer it to another local authority or housing options scheme.

6.1.4 In addition to nomination agreements, we have a number of referral / third party agreements in place with partner organisations and will make a small percentage of properties available each year for these schemes.

6.2   Transfer list

6.2.1   We will use our entitlement of relet properties to undertake lettings to existing One Housing residents. We will maximise the number of properties we can use for existing tenants through the use of chain lets. All properties within our % of nomination agreements becoming available will be considered for re-letting to existing tenants. This includes family homes and one-bedroom properties to reduce overcrowding.

6.2.2   Our approach to the transfer of existing tenants is to focus on those with the greatest need. Housing need priority is set out in the Banding Priority appendix. Priority will be awarded in the following bands based on time waiting in that band:

Band 1: those with the highest level of housing need, an urgent need to move or under-occupying by at least two bedrooms
Band 2: those with a high level of housing need
Band 3: those with a moderate level of housing need
Band 4: those with a lower level or no housing need to move
Band 5: those over 21 years living in an overcrowded One Housing property but is not the tenant, or those experiencing a relationship breakdown in a household with child(ren)

6.2.3   Band 1 will include those who have been given priority status due to a management move and such applicants will normally only be made one suitable offer of accommodation with priority status removed if the offer is refused without good reason. Band 1 applicants will be reviewed every 6 months to establish that their circumstances remain the same and they have been actively seeking another home.

6.2.4   Those seeking medical priority must complete a medical priority request form and be aware that their GP or Consultant may be contacted and asked to provide supporting evidence for their application. Band 1 priority will only be given if it is evidenced that the applicant's current accommodation is having a severely detrimental effect on their medical condition. An independent medical assessor may be used to assess medical applications.

6.2.5   Priority for overcrowding will be given to households under the terms in the 'bedroom standard'. This means a separate bedroom is required for children of the opposite sex aged over 10 years and single adults aged over 21 years. Higher priority may be awarded to overcrowded households when bedrooms are exceptionally small. (ie., suitable for one person only). Priority will not be awarded if the household has deliberately made their household overcrowded.

6.2.6   Adult children living in an overcrowded home can register independently for a one-bedroom property as long as they have been part of the household for the previous 3 years. A joint tenant or a partner of a tenant living in a household with children who have experienced a permanent relationship breakdown may also register in Band 5 to bid for a one bed.

6.2.7   Children will not be included on a transfer application if they have a permanent home elsewhere. Applicants will be asked to provide evidence such as child benefit entitlement and proof of residency, or a custody order.

6.2.8   A transfer or mutual exchange will not be permitted if the household are unable to demonstrate they can afford the property. A household seeking to carry out a mutual exchange to a property with one bedroom in excess of their needs and who will be impacted by the Spare Room Subsidy will not be permitted to exchange.

6.2.9   Transfer applicants who have bid and received an offer on a property which they then turn down without good reason will have their application suspended for six months.

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A further refusal without good reason within 12 months will result in their application being re-listed from the date of the refusal.

6.2.10 Transfer application or have breached their tenancy within the previous 6 months or owe more than 4 weeks rent will not be eligible for transfer. Exceptions will be if the arrears have been created by bedroom size criteria or if they are being moved due to domestic abuse or hate crime.

6.2.11 Transfer list applicants are expected to actively pursue other housing options available such as registering with the local authority and seeking a mutual exchange to increase their chances of moving. All potential exchanges of property must be approved before they can take place. Further guidance is provided on mutual exchanges

6.2.12 Only those with an assured or secure tenancy can register for a transfer. Tenants with a starter tenancy or assured shorthold tenancy are not eligible to register. No tenant can register for a transfer until they have been living in their home for at least one year.

6.2.13 All applicants that have registered for a transfer should be advised of the reason for their banding once their application has been processed. They may appeal against this decision and provide further information for consideration if they believe their circumstances are not reflected by the band they have been placed in. Any such appeal should be considered by the Allocations Manager or Head of Service.

6.3   Management Moves

6.3.1   In certain circumstances a tenant(s) may need to transfer to another property as a matter of urgency, which is known as a management move. These moves will be to manage emergency and / or crisis situations which mean the tenant(s) is unable to remain in or return to their property safely, and certain other extreme priority circumstances.
We will consider management moves in the following circumstances:

- Emergency / highly urgent temporary or permanent decants where the existing property is uninhabitable (e.g. due to fire, flood, major structural defect, other health and safety risk) or to otherwise aid the management of our assets (e.g. redevelopment, disposal)
- Where an adaptation is required (urgent), and it is a more effective solution for the household to move
- Internal moves in accordance with local lettings policies agreed with the local authority
- Where serious medical and health issues make it impossible for the tenant(s) to return to their home because the property is unsuitable (i.e. unable to be discharged from hospital)
- Severe and imminent threat to safety, for example due to domestic abuse, violence, anti-social behaviour, or as part of a witness protection scheme (verified by Police or another independent agency)
- Other reasons where a management move is considered by us to be in the best interests of the tenant and/or One Housing

6.3.2   Eligibility restrictions apply to management moves and will only be considered where there is third-party supporting evidence. This evidence must be recommending a move based on the events surrounding the application and not a letter of support following a request from the tenant.

6.3.3   One reasonable offer will be made. A reasonable offer will meet the applicant's needs in terms of tenure, number of bedrooms (and floor level where relevant), and

will also meet the applicant's requirements in terms of location, where this is relevant to the reason for moving.

6.3.4   All management moves must be approved by the Head of Allocations and Onboarding (or an equivalent Head of Service or Assistant Director).

6.3.5   Supported housing applicants who wish to transfer to another supported housing property which becomes empty should complete a Transfer Request Form. Their application will be considered by the Team Manager for the scheme and they will be advised if their request is successful.

6.4   Decants

6.4.1   If a property can no longer be occupied due to disposal or demolition, or due to extensive repairs or health and safety, the household may need to be required to move into another property.

6.4.2   If the household are unable to move back into the property and must be moved permanently they will be given a high priority and be expected to bid for all suitable properties. If they do not bid for suitable properties One Housing may make them a direct offer.

6.4.3   If a household has to move temporarily they will not be given any priority on the transfer list unless they are already in Band 3 or above and the temporary move is likely to be required for at least 2 months. In such cases they may be considered for a move to the band above.

6.4.4   An area deemed to be part of a regeneration area will usually have a Local Lettings Plan specific to that scheme. This will set out how priority is awarded to existing residents living in the regeneration area and may differ from this Policy.

7   RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1   Actions to address risks and opportunities

7.1.1   The allocation of social housing is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing and homes must be let within the regulatory framework.

7.1.2   Properties must be let within the local authority nomination agreement for the scheme or borough.

7.1.3   Before a property can be let to a member of staff, Board Member or a close relative of a member of staff or Board Member, approval must be obtained by a member of the Executive Team.

7.1.4   A risk assessment will be carried out on the nomination of a convicted sex offender to ensure the location of the property is suitable.

7.1.5   A financial assessment will be carried out before any allocation is agreed to ensure the applicant(s) meets the financial requirements regarding affordability.

8   SUPPORT

8.1   Resources

8.1.1   This policy will be delivered through the Allocations and Onboarding team. They will use a number of software packages to advertise and shortlist properties.

8.2   Competence and Training

8.2.1   All staff must be adequately trained and have knowledge of the agreements and regulations of individual properties when they are becoming available for let.

8.3   Awareness and Communication

8.3.1   This policy will be available on the One Housing website and communicated to local authority partners.

8.4 Data Protection

8.4.1   The data held for allocations is covered by GDPR as it contains sensitive data. Local authorities will have strict regulations on how data is processes and staff must be mindful of the sensitivity of the data they have access to.

8.4.2   All staff must be sufficient trained to ensure the requirements set out in the GDPR are met.

8.5 Documented Information, Records Management

8.5.1   The allocation of social housing is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). The Tenancy Standard set out that registered providers shall:

- Let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how their lettings:
   - Make the best use of available housing
   - Are compatible with the purpose of the housing
   - Contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities
   - Have a clear application, decision making and appeals process

8.5.2   Documentation of personal information relating to lettings is controlled by GDRP and should only be used for application purposes.

9   MONITORING

9.1   The letting of social housing is reported through Continuous Recording (CORE).

9.2   Internally properties let are monitored and reported by:

- Property type and location
- Tenancy and rent type
- Number of refusals
- Applicant type
- Levels of satisfaction

9.3   The allocations and void process are subject to regular audits to ensure the correct procedures and processes are being followed. An annual lettings plan will ensure lets are understood and in line with expected allocations for that property type.

10 BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

10.1   Any allocations not let within the remit of this policy must be authorised by the Head of Service or Assistant Director.

11 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

11.1   The allocations process will be monitored for service improvements through the Customer Feedback Framework.

12 REVIEW

11.1   The Allocation Policy will be reviewed every 3 years or earlier in response to regulatory or legislative changes.

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Banding definitions

Band 1 Top Priority

- Awarded a priority move
- Fleeing domestic violence
- Experiencing harassment due to a characteristics as defined under the Equality Act 2010
- Severe medical need
- Current home due to be demolished or disposed
- Under-occupying a 3 bed or larger and will move to a 1 bed
- Housing costs restricted by 25% due to welfare reform

Band 2: Very Urgent Need

- High medical need
- Under-occupying a 3 bed or larger but still need 2 beds
- Under-occupying a 2 bed and will move to a 1 bed or bedsit
- Living in an adapted property and no longer needs the adaption
- Statutory or severe overcrowding and the household is deficient of two or more bedrooms
- Housing costs restricted by 14% due to welfare reform

Band 3: Identified Housing Need

- Overcrowded and deficient by at least one bedroom
- Non-urgent medical need

Band 4: General / Low Priority
- Move will improve chances of employment or training
- Register foster-carer
- Has child(ren) to stay regularly

Band 5: Resident in a One Housing home
- Aged over 21 years and living in an overcrowded home
- Joint tenant or partner of tenant who have experienced a permanent relationship breakdown and have children living in the home

All bands are joined from the bottom with time waiting starting afresh for that band.