



ALLOCATIONS POLICY

September 2006

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Association has developed an Allocations Policy in order to enable it to provide high quality, affordable housing stock to persons in housing need.
- 1.2 The policy has been produced following a Best Value Review of the Association's approach to Allocations. It will seek to ensure that social housing needs are met through:
- The provision of a high quality, efficient and effective allocations service which is accessible, equitable and customer focussed.
 - The effective use of the Association's housing stock and considerate of the need to build balanced and sustainable communities.
 - Ensuring that the service is operated efficiently, keeping re-let times to a minimum and maximising Association income and according with legislative, regulatory and good practice good practice.
 - Building in flexibility to the process to ensure local needs are met and conferring on management the ability to act promptly in cases where the need demands such action.
 - Working in collaboration with partners and stakeholders wherever possible, including local authorities, through participation in nomination arrangements and Choice Based Letting (CBL) schemes wherever possible.

2 POLICY STATEMENT

Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of this Allocations Policy may be outlined as seeking to ensure the following:
- All potential and existing tenants are treated equitably and within the policy framework, regardless of their gender, religion, age, disability, vulnerability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or marital status.
 - All allocations contribute to meeting housing needs and the development of sustainable and diverse communities.
 - Customers are provided with accurate and timely information, advice and a service that enables them to exercise real housing "choice".
 - The Association makes effective use of its housing stock, including achieving a balance between the provision of properties to persons in greatest need with the best use of its stock to achieve stable and balanced communities.

Allocations Policy



- Customers are matched with appropriate housing stock
- Customers are kept well informed throughout the re-housing process
- The Association is able to work in partnership with its partners and stakeholders, including local authorities, through participation in nomination arrangements and Choice Based Letting (CBL) schemes wherever possible.
- Accurate and timely information about the performance of the service is produced to enable continuous improvements to take place.
- Staff are provided with the knowledge, guidance and framework in which to deliver the Allocations service.

Contribution to Corporate Objectives

2.2 The Association has adopted and reviews annually its Corporate Plan, which sets out the strategic objectives of the Association and the activities that it will deliver in seeking to achieve these. In particular, this policy will contribute to the following corporate objectives:

- Contributes to the development of sustainable communities through sensitive and equitable allocation practices.
- Deliver customer focussed service, which is fair, open and transparent, enabling the customer to exercise choice over their housing needs.
- Maximise operational efficiency through the implementation of efficient and effective practices that accord with best practice and the policy framework that has been put in place.
- Fulfills the objectives of the Group, through ensuring that there is a commitment to staff and meeting their training and development needs, that they are aware of how the policy is to be implemented and followed, and that they are encouraged to continually improve the services delivered and their contribution within this.

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

2.3 The Association is aware of its legislative and regulatory obligations and will seek to deliver its Allocation services in accordance with these at all times. These will form the minimum requirements of the service, which will seek to exceed these and comply with good practice wherever possible.

2.4 Relevant legislation is as follows:

- The Housing Act 1985
- The Housing Act 1988

Allocations Policy



- The Housing Act 1996 (particularly Parts VI and VII)
- Homelessness Act 2002

2.5 The Association also has a broader commitment to providing its Allocations services in a non-discriminatory way. As a result, compliance with the following legislation is also required:

- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005

2.6 Additional Regulatory guidance is located within the following:

- Housing Corporation Regulatory Code (particularly Paragraph 3)
- Housing Corporation Circular 02/03
- Housing Corporation Circular 07/04

Scope of the Policy

2.7 This policy applies to the allocations of all the Association's social housing rented properties.

2.8 The Association will accept applications for housing from persons aged 16 years and over (subject to the special provisions applicable to those persons aged 16-17 years).

Application Process and Sources

General

2.9 The Association will allocate its properties in an equitable and non-discriminatory way. This means that no person applying for housing with the Association will be treated less favourably because of their gender, religion, age, disability, vulnerability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or marital status.

2.10 Applications will be accepted from a range of sources. They may be summarised as follows:

- Direct applicants
- Nominations / Choice Based Lettings schemes
- Transfer applicants
- Management allocations (e.g. decants; racial harassment; domestic violence; fire/flood)

2.11 The Association will promote a range of options that enable customers to apply for housing with the Association. This will include direct application using the following:

- Over the telephone
- In person at one of the Association's offices

Allocations Policy



- By e-mail
- Post
- Internet (where not participating in Choice Based Letting arrangements)

It is also possible for customers to access Association housing through using local authority Choice Based Letting (CBL) schemes where these are in operation.

The Association will publish a range of literature in prominent locations at offices and on the Association website that clearly explains to customers how they may access Association properties. This will also be available in a range of languages and formats, including Braille and large print.

- 2.12 Assistance will be available to all customers who require it in completing the Association's application for housing.

Direct Applications

- 2.13 Direct applications for housing with the Association will be accepted in local authority areas which do not operate Choice Based Letting schemes. Where demand outstrips supply, this will normally involve being placed upon the Association's waiting list.

Choice Based Lettings

- 2.14 The Association is committed to maximising the ability of its customers to exercise housing choice. This accords with the Government commitment that all social landlords will operate forms of Choice Based Letting (CBL) schemes by 2010.
- 2.15 Where CBL schemes are in operation within a particular local authority area, the Association will commit itself to participating in these schemes as much as possible. This will mean that 100% of all new allocations will be done through the local authority CBL scheme and no separate waiting lists will be operated. This will currently be the situation in Sefton, Wirral, Liverpool and St. Helens local authority areas.
- 2.16 It is anticipated that Sub-Regional CBL schemes will be developed by 2010. These are considered to offer increased choice and reduced bureaucracy in the allocations process, and will be supported by the Association when available.

Nominations

- 2.17 In areas where CBL schemes are not available, up to 50% of all properties will be offered to the local authority nominations.
- 2.18 Where the Association participates in the CBL schemes of local authorities, it is not required to offer any additional nominations within these areas. The local authority areas to which 50% nominations will be given by the Association are currently Halton, Knowsley and West Lancashire.

Allocations Policy



- 2.19 In making its properties available for nominations, the Association will make available an equitable mix of properties in terms of their location, quality and size.
- 2.20 Where the local authorities provide a number of nominees for the Association's vacant properties, they will be allocated in accordance with the priority indicated by the local authority. If no or equal priority is given, the Association will allocate its properties in accordance with its own priority systems.

Transfers

- 2.21 The Association will accept requests for transfers from existing tenants who have been resident in their existing property for one year or more, except for exceptional or emergency circumstances.
- 2.22 Overall, the Association will aim to allocate no more than 20% of its properties to transfers in any given financial year (including Management Allocations).
- 2.23 All tenants who make a transfer request will be contacted by a member of the Allocations and Support Team. This will normally take place over the telephone, and involve a discussion regarding the tenant's housing needs.
- 2.24 Where a tenant is requesting a transfer, an inspection of the property will also be required to ensure that there is no damage. This will be undertaken by a member of the Association's Property Services department.
- 2.25 Transfer requests will normally only be authorised in the following situations:
- There are no outstanding rent arrears or other charges (including sundry debts) owed to the Association and the tenant's rent account has been continuously clear for a period of 3 months immediately prior to the transfer request being made
 - There have been no breaches of the tenancy, which has been conducted satisfactorily
 - The property meets the Association's minimum voids standards.
- 2.26 Tenants requesting a transfer will not be placed upon the transfer waiting list until the criteria listed in Paragraph 2.25 above have been justified.
- 2.27 Transfer requests will not normally be considered from applicants where the applicant:
- Does not fall into any housing need category
 - Has failed to make good damage that has been caused to their current property
 - Has committed some form of tenancy breach which has been substantiated, including anti-social behaviour, harassment or threatening behaviour

Allocations Policy



- Has received a Notice of Intention Seeking Possession
 - Has breached the terms of a Suspended Possession Order
- 2.28 All accepted transfer requests will be added to the Association's waiting / transfer list and processed in accordance with the Association's priority categories. Tenants requesting a transfer will at this point also be provided with an estimated indication of the length of time they can expect to wait for their request to be met.
- 2.29 The conditions applied to the processing of transfer requests will not apply where "exceptional" circumstances exist. This is in circumstances such as where the tenant making the transfer request is in danger, such as from harassment or domestic violence, or there has been a significant change in the tenant's circumstances which are in addition to the reason for which a transfer request has been accepted. "Exceptional" circumstances do not include a worsening of the conditions for which a request has been accepted, unless this was to result in the tenant being in danger.
- 2.30 In such circumstances where "exceptional" circumstances exist, the Association will seek to inform the tenant requesting a transfer of the availability of re-housing provision within 2 working days and to re-house the tenant as quickly as possible.

MOVEUK mobility scheme

- 2.31 The Association will participate in MOVEUK national mobility scheme. This is an organisation established to assist social housing tenants to locate housing in other parts of the country.
- 2.32 Existing Association tenants wishing to move to other parts of the country, and tenants wishing to move into the Association's properties from other parts of the country, will be able to be considered for this through participation in the MOVEUK scheme.
- 2.33 There will not be a requirement to undertake checks on persons wishing to take up a tenancy of the Association at registration stage, as this will have been undertaken by the nominating landlord. They will be required however prior to a tenancy offer being made to ensure that there have been no changes in circumstances since registration, such as accrual of arrears.
- 2.34 The prioritisation of applicants via the MOVEUK scheme will be done in the same manner as that applied to tenants who are on one of the Association's waiting lists. All such applicants will be placed on the Association's transfer waiting list for the relevant local authority area in which they are seeking re-housing, regardless of whether the Association is participating in Choice Based Letting schemes within the area.

Mutual Exchanges

- 2.35 Tenants have a right to mutual exchanges with tenants of other Registered Social Landlords and Local Authorities. The Association will maintain a central register of mutual exchanges.

Allocations Policy



- 2.36 All applicants for a mutual exchange will require the prior written consent of their landlord, including confirmation that there are no outstanding rent arrears, before a mutual exchange will be authorised to take place.
- 2.37 Full and further details relating to the Association's approach to mutual exchanges are located within the Association's Mutual Exchanges Policy.

16/17 Year Olds

- 2.38 Applications received from persons aged 16 or 17 years of age will be accepted where they require independent housing. However, this will be subject to the following conditions:
- A person is willing to act as a "guarantor *ad litum*" (responsible adult) for the applicant until they reach the age of 18 years. This would include payment of rent where obligations are not being met. The guarantor may be a parent, guardian or Social Services.
 - A referral to assess the applicants need for additional support will also normally be made prior to re-housing if this is not already in place to seek to ensure the applicant will be able to maintain their independence.
 - The offer made to persons aged 16 or 17 would be a 'licence to occupy' which would be reviewed upon the person reaching the age of 18, when a full tenancy would be issued, subject to satisfactory behaviour during the licence period.

Special Needs and Sheltered Housing

- 2.39 Where local authorities operate a centralised system for the allocation of adapted properties, the Association will seek to allocate all of its adapted properties through this system. This is currently the case in Liverpool, through the Association's participation in ACCESS.
- 2.40 Where centralised systems are not in operation, the Association will seek to work with the Local Authority to identify possible suitable applicants for adapted properties, as well as referring to its own waiting lists for applicants with specific medical needs.
- 2.41 Where an applicant for housing with the Association is currently in receipt of housing related support, and that or similar support will not be available due to moving across local authority areas, those applicants may not be accepted for housing until appropriate support is also available.
- 2.42 The Association can signpost and assist applicants to access suitable support from its partner support providers. Where appropriate support can be secured, the applicant can be placed upon the Association's waiting list for accommodation with the original date of application.
- 2.43 The allocation of applicants to the Association's designated supported housing schemes will be conducted by the relevant support providers with whom the Association has entered into management contracts, and in accordance with the arrangements set out in these arrangements.

Suspensions and Restrictions

- 2.44 The Association is committed to the development of sustainable communities. This involves communities containing a broad range of people, and the Association will consider the implications of its approach to property allocations in view of this, and not apply arbitrary restrictions.
- 2.45 The Association has a number of groups of persons whom it would normally restrict from being eligible to receive an Association tenancy. All applicants received from the following groups will be refused:
- Applicants from abroad who are subject to immigration control as consistent with Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.
 - Applicants who are in need of support, but the support has been refused by the applicant or appropriate support is currently not available.
 - Applicants who do not qualify for housing with the Association by virtue of them falling within the Association's suspensions policy. This includes the following categories which would prevent an applicant from being allocated an Association property:
 - Applicant who have breached the terms of a previous or current tenancy which gives rise to a statutory ground for possession. This could include such acts as:
 - Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Harassment
 - Domestic Violence
 - Hate Crime
 - Arrears of rent or other charges (with no agreement to pay in place)
 - Abandonment
 - Convictions for arrestable offences
 - Applicants that have committed or threatened acts of violence against an officer of the Association
 - Applicants or a member of their family that are currently subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or Injunction
- 2.46 All applicants have a right to appeal against any decision to exclude them from re-housing by the Association, which would be considered by the Director of Housing Services.
- 2.47 With the exception of applicants who are subject to immigration control or in need of appropriate support, any suspensions applied will be for a maximum period of 12 months. However, each case will be reviewed and considered on its merit to ensure that unfair discrimination does not occur.

Offenders and Ex-Offenders

- 2.48 The Association aims to balance the needs to provide housing for such groups against the risks posed to particular households or the wider community. However, each application from offenders and ex-offenders will be considered on its merits and no blanket exclusions will be applied.
- 2.49 All applicants are therefore requested to declare if they, or any members of their household, have committed serious offences that are not spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.
- 2.50 An application that fails to make a declaration will be unable to proceed until the declaration has been made.
- 2.51 Where a conviction is declared, the applicant will be requested to provide further details of why they no longer pose a threat to the community. The Association will also seek risk assessments from appropriate agencies such as the Probation Service, to inform the allocation process in terms of whether it may proceed, and that informed decisions regarding the suitability of property type and location, and that controls are in place to safeguard staff and members of the wider community.
- 2.52 All allocations to offenders and ex-offenders falling within this category should be considered and approved by the Director of Housing before any tenancy may be granted to such persons.

Schedule 1

- 2.53 All allocations will be done in accordance with the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996, which stipulates how associations cannot grant any non-contractual payment or benefits to staff, board members or their families. This would include the granting of tenancies.
- 2.54 Where any letting falls within the scope of Schedule 1, the Association will seek to make use of the Housing Corporation special and general determinations, and in particular, General Exemptions 3 and 6.
- 2.55 In accordance with Section 4 of the General Determination 2000, any decision to allocate tenancies under Schedule 1 must be taken by the RSL's Governing Body, and any officer with an interest must declare that to the meeting, and leave whilst the matter is discussed, and the outcome minuted.
- 2.56 The Board must be assured that any such allocation falling within the scope of Schedule 1 meets the following criteria:
- Defines the nature of the relationship
 - Is being done in line with the Association's Allocations Policy and meets with the published criteria under which the Association allocates properties

Allocations Policy



- Additional managerial checks have been applied to ensure that the proposed offer of accommodation has been made in accordance with the Association's Allocations policy criteria
- The applicant has not been shown any favour in this proposed offer and has received exactly the same treatment as other applicants
- The staff member to whom the Applicant is related has had no involvement or influence over the decision-making process
- The applicant is currently in housing need and there is currently no other alternative social housing available

2.57 Where Association properties are allocated to staff members, additional controls must be put in place in accordance with General Exemption 3 which ensures that the officer will not be placed in situations of potential conflict of interest, such as the management of their own rent accounts for instance.

Processing Applications

2.58 Within 2 working days of the Association receiving an enquiry relating to re-housing, it will make contact with the applicant to assess if it will be able to assist the applicant with their re-housing needs.

2.59 Upon establishing contact with an applicant whom the Association may be able to assist to meet their re-housing needs, the applicant will be invited to attend a meeting at an Association office to complete an application and supply supporting documentation. This meeting will be arranged within 5 working days.

2.60 Where applicants are unable to attend the Association's offices, consideration will be given to making Home Visits. This will particularly be the case where an applicant's request is of a sensitive nature.

2.61 Applicants will also be assisted in making their application over the telephone. However, it will still be necessary to ensure that applicants are able to supply the relevant documentation in support of their application.

2.62 Details of the documentation that applicants are expected to supply are outlined in the next section of this policy.

2.63 Where required supporting documentation is not provided at the application meeting the application will be unable to proceed and the applicant would be requested to supply outstanding documentation to the Association within 5 working days.

2.64 Where supporting documentation is not provided within this period, the applicant will be informed that their application has been placed on hold. If the applicant is not able to provide the relevant outstanding information within the following 10 working days they will be

Allocations Policy



informed that their application has been cancelled and that they must seek to re-apply should they still wish re-housing by the Association.

- 2.65 Where a completed application has been received in full, the Association will aim to inform the applicant of the outcome of their request for re-housing within 2 working days. This will indicate whether the Association is likely to be able to offer suitable housing (both type and location) to the applicant, and if possible, an indication of the likely waiting times. This will follow an assessment of the applicant's need for housing.

Tenant Checks

- 2.66 Prior to an application for housing being accepted by the Association, it will seek to verify the identity of the applicant and the validity of their circumstances as detailed within their application. This information will be used to assess if an applicant is suitable for accessing the Association's waiting lists and being offered one of its properties.
- 2.67 Where it appears possible that an applicant may be approved for housing with the Association, they will be invited to attend a meeting with a member of the Association's Allocations and Support Team to complete an application form and provide additional evidence of the following:
- Supporting documentation to verify current housing circumstances
 - Proof of identity
 - Proof of current address
 - Details of previous addresses over the past 5 years
 - Landlord references (or 2 character references where not available)
 - Up to date rent statements
 - Household income details
 - Children's birth certificates and custody details (if applicable)
 - Medical conditions
 - Other details which support an applicant's ability to sustain a tenancy (e.g. risk assessments from Police / Probation Services) or demonstrate a proof of needs
- 2.68 The Association also reserves the right to conduct other additional checks with relevant agencies to assess the suitability of an applicant where required. Permission for seeking such checks is sought from applicants as part of the application process.
- 2.69 References relating to conduct and rent arrears will be sought from the previous (including current) landlords of all applicants. This will relate to tenancies with other Registered Social Landlords, Local Authorities, and private rented landlords, as well as other types of occupancies.
- 2.70 In situations where references from current or former landlords cannot be supplied, at least two character references will be accepted as an alternative.

Allocations Policy



- 2.71 Where the applicant has declared unspent convictions, reports may also be necessary to be obtained from the Probation Service as part of an overall risk assessment, as detailed elsewhere in this policy.
- 2.72 Where the applicant has a declared support need, information from relevant support agencies will be sought to assess the nature of the applicant's support needs and how this may impact on their ability to sustain a tenancy.
- 2.73 All references will be checked at the time of offering a property to an applicant to ensure that the details obtained in the references remain up to date and valid.

Confidentiality

- 2.74 All information received from applicants as part of the Allocations process will be considered and treated as confidential. Such information will not be disclosed to any third parties without the prior informed consent of the persons to which the information relate.
- 2.75 All applicants are requested to give their consent to references about them being taken up, in order for their application to proceed.
- 2.76 All hardcopy information will be stored in secure and lockable filing cabinets, and will only be removed from the office environment for the purposes of conducting a home visit.
- 2.77 All electronic information will be stored in accordance with the requirements set out in the Data Protection Act.
- 2.78 All applicants have the right to view the information that they have supplied, or which has been supplied by third parties about them, unless it has been supplied on a confidential basis. Where an applicant does not agree with the accuracy of the information held, they may request that the information be corrected or that their disagreement is formally recorded on the information.
- 2.79 Performance monitoring will be undertaken by the Association in relation to the allocations service, and reported to the Board of Management and external agencies such as required. All such monitoring will be conducted on an anonymous basis so that individual applicants may not be identified.

Priority Systems and Housing Need

- 2.80 The Association operates a priority system that enables it to give reasonable priority to the homeless and those persons in priority housing need through the operation of local authority nominations (Regulatory Code, Paragraph 3.6).
- 2.81 The Association also aims to meet its obligations to give reasonable priority to transfer applicants, including those from outside sources.

2.82 The Association has developed a Priority System and sets targets in relation to the allocation of properties within each group. These will be reviewed on an annual basis and agreed by the Board of Management, taking into account the obligations placed on the Association, discussions with relevant local authorities, as well as demand, stock turnover, void costs, and any development programmes requiring decanting to take place.

2.83 The Priority System is divided into 2 categories as follows:

Priority List

- Severe overcrowding (requiring 2 or more bedrooms)
- People living in unsuitable accommodation, this will include where the property:
 - Has bad problems with rising or penetrating damp
 - Is not structurally stable (e.g. subsidence)
 - Does not have adequate ventilation, natural and artificial light or heating
 - Does not have adequate supply of fresh water
 - Does not have a sink with hot and cold water
 - Does not have an indoor toilet
 - Does not have a fixed bath or shower and wash basin with hot and cold water
 - Does not have a good drainage and sewerage system
 - Does not have satisfactory cooking facilities
 - Does not have an adequate entrance
- Decants –
 - Tenants who have received a declaration of Demolition or Clearance
 - Tenants upon whom Notice has been served
- Persons under threat of violence (both physical or verbal, including domestic violence, harassment and racial harassment)
- Persons requiring re-housing due to specific medical needs, which may include:
 - disabled persons requiring adapted properties
 - persons needing to move closer to hospital or clinic where they receive regular treatment

General List

- All other applicants that are eligible for re-housing with the Association will be placed on the General waiting list.

2.84 There is generally a high demand for the Association's properties. Where an applicant does not fall within one of the Priority categories, they will be informed that they are not "eligible" to be registered on the Association's waiting list at present due to a lack of housing need. They should be advised that they may re-apply for housing in the future should their circumstances change.

Allocations Policy



2.85 The letting targets set for 2006/07 are as follows:

	Liverpool	Wirral	Knowsley	Sefton	Halton	W. Lancs.	St. Helens
New Allocations:							
LA Nominations	n/a	n/a	50%	n/a	50%	50%	50%
Category 1	n/a	n/a	20%	n/a	20%	20%	20%
Category 2	n/a	n/a	10%	n/a	10%	10%	10%
Choice Based Lettings	80%	80%	n/a	80%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Internal:							
Transfers	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Management Allocations	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%

(NOTE – Allocations targets subject to annual review and excludes lettings of adapted properties)

Allocations Process

General

- 2.86 A separate waiting list will be maintained for each local authority area where the Association has not signed up to allocate all its properties via the local authorities' choice based lettings schemes.
- 2.87 Where applicants are placed on a waiting list, they will be placed under their priority category, and in date order from when the application is approved.
- 2.88 Where applicants are placed on a waiting list, they will be informed of the anticipated waiting time for a property meeting their stated preferences.
- 2.89 All waiting lists will be reviewed at least every 6 months to ensure that it remains up to date and reflects the needs and preferences of applicants who are placed upon it. This will require all applicants on the waiting list to confirm their housing situation and whether they wish to remain on the waiting list.

Allocations Policy



- 2.90 Where applicants on the waiting list fail to respond to the Association's 6 monthly review within 14 days, they will be removed from the Association waiting list.
- 2.91 Where the waiting list becomes excessively long (more than 5 applicants per property and person at the top of waiting list has been waiting for re-housing for over 1 year) the waiting list for applicants falling within the Priority 2 category will be closed for 3 months, when the waiting list will be re-visited. Any applicants applying directly for housing within this period will be advised that unless their application falls within the Priority 1 category, they will not be considered until the waiting list is re-opened.
- 2.92 Where applicants make false or misleading statements, fail to disclose material information, or fail to inform the Association of material changes to an applicant's circumstances whilst waiting for housing, should be aware that this is a criminal offence and will be removed from the waiting list and excluded from obtaining housing from the Association. In such circumstances where this situation results in an applicant being allocated a property, the Association will seek possession of the property.

Management Allocations

- 2.93 Although the general provisions contained within this Policy will apply to the vast majority of property allocations, special provision is made for circumventing these in situations presenting particular urgent or special needs.
- 2.94 In such circumstances, referred to as "management lets", the allocation of property will require the consent of the Director of Housing Services. In assessing whether to make a 'management letting', the Director of Housing Services will consider the following:
- The presenting circumstances are "exceptional" and "urgent"
 - The effect not making the proposed 'management let' would have on both the presenting person, in comparison to those currently on one of the Association's waiting lists.
 - Whether any alternative options are available, such as re-housing elsewhere in other social housing provision or temporary accommodation whilst permanent social housing is identified.
- 2.95 Only one 'reasonable' management letting offer will be made in these circumstances. Where refused, the applicant will be entitled to apply for re-housing through the normal policy and procedures of the Association.

Local Letting Policies

- 2.96 The second situation where the Association's general provisions contained within this Policy may not be followed are where 'Local Letting Policies' have been introduced.

Allocations Policy



- 2.97 The Association has a commitment to building sustainable and balanced communities. This requires the Association to be flexible to particular issues that may arise in areas where the Association operates.
- 2.98 Any Local Lettings Policy will only relate to specified estate or scheme to prevent or seek to address a particular issue in order to achieve stable communities. They would have the following characteristics:
- The Local Lettings Policy would only be temporary
 - The policy would be for a pre-defined period of time, following which it would be reviewed to assess if it needs to continue
 - They may only be introduced following consultation with local residents and the relevant Local Authority
 - They would form part of a wider approach to tackling issues within a particular locality
 - They would require the authorisation of the Board of Management, although authority is delegated to the Director of Housing Services to introduce such Local Lettings Policies in between meetings of the Board where there is a requirement to do so, in which circumstances retrospective authority will be sought at the next available meeting of the Board of Management.
- 2.99 Examples of where a Local Lettings Policy might be required are as follows:
- Allowing properties to be under-occupied in low demand areas or where there are high child densities
 - Introducing a minimum age for flats with shared entrances which have experienced anti-social behaviour
 - Giving preference to relatives of existing tenants to help build communities

“Hard to Let” Properties

- 2.100 The third situation where the Association’s general provisions contained within this Policy may not be followed are where the Association is experiencing difficulties in letting particular properties which it classifies as “hard to let”.
- 2.101 Where a property is identified as “hard to let”, it will be let on a “first come – first served” basis as opposed to housing need.
- 2.102 A property will be classified as “hard to let” if one of the following applies:
- 3 offers have been made on the property and refused

Allocations Policy



- The property has experienced difficulties in letting previously, such as:
 - Multiple refusals
 - Significant void periods of 4 weeks or more
- Similar properties in the locality the vacant property have experienced difficulties in letting, such as:
 - Multiple refusals
 - Significant void periods of 4 weeks or more

2.103 The designation of a property as “hard to let” requires the authorisation of the Allocations and Support Co-ordinator.

2.104 Where a property is identified as “hard to let”, the waiting list where one exists should still be used as the first reference point for identifying potential tenants.

2.105 Where no potential applicant can be identified, consideration should be given to the following:

- Direct advertising of the property (e.g. local press)
- Use of a letting agency

2.106 In such circumstances, the property will be offered to the first person who expresses an interest in the property, and who is not excluded from re-housing, as detailed in Sections 2.44 to 2.47.

2.107 Where an offer is made, but refused, the applicant will be given the option of completing a full application for re-housing with the Association, which will be assessed in accordance with the general policy protocols set out in this Policy.

Offers

2.108 The Association will normally select applicants from the top of the waiting list, sorted in date order, for offers of accommodation, in areas where a waiting list is operated. However, regard will also be given to the following:

- applicant’s preferences in terms of location and property type
- the need to maintain balanced communities
- local lettings policies
- difficult to let properties

2.109 Where applicants are not selected from the top of the waiting list, authorisation will be required from the Allocations and Support Co-ordinator, and the reason for selecting an applicant from lower down the waiting list recorded on the allocations database.

Allocations Policy



2.110 All applicants will be made formal offers of accommodation in writing. The details that the offer will include will be as follows:

- Type of tenancy
- Property address
- Rent levels and other charges

2.111 Each applicant will be given 3 working days to respond to an offer, before the offer is made to another applicant.

2.112 Where applicants accept an offer of accommodation, they should formally sign an acceptance letter and agree to a tenancy sign-up date.

2.113 All applicants will be given the opportunity to view a property before they need to decide if they are to accept an offer of a property.

2.114 Where property viewings are to take place, all viewings will be accompanied by an officer of the Association. This will give the applicant an opportunity to discuss any issues about the property that they may have. A record of all viewings undertaken should be made, and whether it was accompanied, in order to monitor performance against the performance target of 100% accompanied viewings.

Property Sizes

2.115 In assessing the suitability of a property for an applicant, regard will be given to the number of bedrooms a property contains.

2.116 Where direct applications are received and considered, the following will act as a guide. However, it is not a set of prescribed rules, as this may be influenced by such factors as supply and demand, property types, or how a household may soon fall within another category (e.g. age of children will require re-housing within the next 12 months):

Property Type	Household Size
Bedsit	Single person
1 Bedroom	Single person or Couple
2 Bedrooms	Families with 1 child under 16 Families with 2 children of opposite sex aged under 7 Families with children of the same sex aged under 10

Allocations Policy



3 Bedrooms	Families with 2 children where one is aged over 10 years Families with 3 children
4 Bedrooms or more	Families with 3 or more children

2.117 The table is based upon the following principles which will guide officer in making re-housing decisions:

- Adults sharing accommodation, but not living as a couple, should have different bedrooms.
- Children of the same sex may share a bedroom until the age of 10
- Children of differing sexes may share a bedroom until the age of 7
- No more than two children may share a bedroom, regardless of age

Refusals

2.118 All applicants nominated by a local authority will be made one offer of accommodation. Where the offer is 'reasonable' but is refused, the applicant will be suspended from being eligible for the Association's properties under this category for re-housing. They may choose to make a new application for housing from the Association and their application would be processed in accordance with the general protocols set out in this Policy. The Local Authority will also be informed in such circumstances of the refusal so that they may discharge their duty of care.

2.119 All applicants on the waiting list or tenants requesting a transfer will be given 3 reasonable offers.

2.120 Following 3 refusals, contact will be made with the applicant to discuss and assess if the Association is going to be able to assist the applicant to find suitable housing. Subject to this discussion, the applicant may be removed from the Association's waiting lists. Alternatively, if the applicant still wishes to pursue re-housing with the Association, their application will be re-dated to the date of their last refused offer.

Appeals Process

2.121 All applicants that are unhappy with a decision that has been made by the Association with regards to a person's application for re-housing should be referred to the Association's Complaint's Policy, details of which can be made available on request.

Allocations Policy



Performance Monitoring

2.122 All allocations made by the Association will be recorded using Joint Centre for Social Housing Research's CORE (Continuous Recording) monitoring, in accordance with Housing Corporation requirements.

2.123 Data collected for CORE will also feed into the Association's standard performance monitoring framework. This will include the following indicators:

- Average re-let times (Housing Corporation Best Value Indicator)
- BME allocations (Housing Corporation Best Value Indicator)
- Source of Allocations (by Local Authority and Priority Groups)
- Number of applications received (by Local Authority area)
- Allocations made on 1st offer
- Accompanied viewings
- Customer satisfaction with Allocations Service
- Compliance with service standards (minimum 25% check)

2.124 In addition, the Association will undertake qualitative monitoring of its performance in the form of customer satisfaction questionnaires. These will be issued to all new tenants that have been through the Association's Allocation process. This will include seeking feedback on how the service can be improved, and feed into the Association's annual Business Planning process and the departmental improvement action plan.

2.125 The systems of control that are in place within the Allocations service will also be subject to regular testing as part of the Association's Internal Audit function.

2.126 The Allocations and Support Team will meet on a weekly basis to discuss any day-to-day operational issues. They will also meet on a monthly basis to discuss customer feedback and any incremental improvements to the service that may be required.

Service Standards

2.127 The Association is committed to delivering a high quality service that is administered equitably and transparently. It invests in its staff through training and personal development, and implements a programme of continuous improvements to ensure that its services not only comply with minimum requirements for strive to be sector leaders.

2.128 In addition to the Association's standard set of service standards, it will also seek to meet the following service commitments:

- All applications for housing with the Association will be processed in accordance with its Allocations Policy.
- All initial queries relating to re-housing with the Association will be responded to within 2 working days

Allocations Policy



- All completed applications will be processed and responded to within 2 working days, indicating the outcome of the application.
- The Association will inform every applicant of the likely waiting time for a property that meets their stated housing preferences
- All offers of housing will initially be made over the telephone where possible, and followed up in writing on the same day
- Where the Association is not able to offer suitable housing to an applicant, the Association will always provide assistance by signposting applicants to alternative social housing providers.
- All relevant information relating to nominations will be completed and forwarded to the relevant Local Authority within 5 working days of a tenancy offer being accepted.
- The Association's waiting lists will be updated every 6 months
- All applicants will be given the opportunity to have an accompanied viewing of a property they are offered before they have to make a decision whether to accept an offer
- All applicants undertaking a tenancy viewing will be issued with a draft Tenancy Agreement
- All new tenants will be issued with a copy of the following at sign-up:
 - Tenancy Agreement
 - Tenants Charter
 - Tenants Handbook
 - Tenants Welcome Pack
- All new tenants will receive a home visit within 8 weeks of the tenancy commencing

Tenancy Type

2.129 All new tenants will be issued with a 'starter tenancy' (Assured Shorthold Tenancy), for a period of 12 months, after which it will revert to a full assured tenancy, subject to the satisfactory conduct of the tenant(s) and their household during the starter tenancy period.

2.130 The exception to this practice relates to the allocation of tenancies within schemes designated for older persons (Over 55s / Sheltered Accommodation), where 'starter tenancies' will not be operated. Tenants in these schemes will be issued with standard Assured Tenancies.

Equal Opportunities and Diversity

- 2.131 The Association adopts a proactive approach to Equality and Diversity, which is championed at Board and Senior Management levels.
- 2.132 The Association seeks to ensure that its Allocations processes are operated equitably and within the policy framework, regardless of the gender, religion, age, disability, vulnerability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or marital status of applicants.
- 2.133 Access to the Allocations service will be promoted by ensuring the following:
- Information and literature display language flags and are available to tenants and potential tenants in a range of formats, including Braille, large print, alternative languages or on audio tape.
 - Access to Language Line will be available
 - Association offices are physically accessible

3 IMPLEMENTATION

- 3.1 The Director of Housing Services will ensure that the Allocations and Support department is adequately staffed and that workloads remain manageable to ensure that the Allocations service may be delivered in accordance with this policy.
- 3.2 The Director of Housing Services will ensure that there is a sufficient range of procedures in place that enable staff to be informed about how to deliver the Allocations service in accordance with policy requirements.
- 3.3 The performance of the Allocations service will be reviewed on a quarterly basis in terms of its performance against targets, with recommendations for change being made where necessary.
- 3.4 The Allocations and Support Co-ordinator will ensure that all officers act in accordance with the Allocations Policy.
- 3.5 Officers within the Allocations and Support department will be responsible for receiving applications for housing, processing them in accordance with this policy, and maintaining the Association's service standards.

4 RESPONSIBILITY

- 4.1 Overall responsibility for implementation of this policy lies with the Director of Housing.
- 4.2 The Allocations and Support Co-ordinator is responsible for the application of this policy, monitoring performance, identifying shortfalls and recommending action to rectify situation as applicable.
- 4.3 Day to day operation of this policy is the responsibility of the officers within the Allocations and Support Team.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Association will consult every 3 years with the staff, outside agencies and benchmarking groups to promote continuous improvement and develop good practice in this policy.
- 5.2 Prior to making any changes to this policy the Association will consent and consider the view of:
 - All relevant staff
 - Senior Management Team
 - The Tenants' Forum
 - Board of Management
 - Residents, Tenants Groups, individual interested tenants
 - All relevant outside agencies

6 REVIEW

- 6.1 The Association will formally review its Allocations Policy on a 3 yearly basis, unless changes in legislation or regulation require an earlier review.
- 6.2 Findings and recommendations will be presented to the Association's Board of Management after the views of the Forum have been considered. A review team will carry out each review.
- 6.3 Progress reports will be made to the Board of Management and Forum, to enable monitoring against strategic aims and objectives and agreed performance indicators. Performance data will be included in the annual report to tenants

7 TRAINING

7.1 The Association will provide all staff responsible for implementing this policy with comprehensive training.

7.2 Training will be given to:

- New staff
- Existing staff on an annual basis as a refresher/update as required
- All relevant staff after change to policy/legislation
- To relevant outside agencies
- Any other times as identified by the Director of Housing Services, Team Leaders or Group Policy and Performance Manager

8 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

8.1 The Association has the following relevant documents:

- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Succession of Tenancy Policy
- Standards for New Lettings Policy
- Voids Policy and Procedures
- Vulnerable Tenants Policy
- Adaptations Policy
- Rent Arrears Policy
- Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Complaints policy and procedures
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Racial Harassment Policy
- Domestic Violence Policy
- Communications Strategy and Customer Care Policy

Allocations Policy



8.2 This Allocations Policy will replace the following policies:

- Applications and Lettings Policy
- Lettings Policy – Exclusions
- Lettings Policy – Selection and Allocation
- Transfer Policy

9 POLICY REVIEW SUMMARY

Policy Title	Allocations Policy
Dated Created	11 th September 2006
Review Period	3 Yearly
Review Committee	Board of Management
Version	1.5
Date last amended	16 th October 2006
Authorised by	Board of Management
Date of last review	September 2006
Date of next review	September 2009