



homes, communities, cultures

Lettings Policy

Selection of Applicants, Allocation of Properties, Transfer of Existing Tenants & Access to Waiting List

Version #:	Date:	Summary of Changes
Version 8	Jan 2018	Amendment to job titles, minor change to transfer and letting strategy sections.
Version 7	February 2017	Amendments to reflect transfer rules.
Version 6	February 2015	Changes made to ensure the policy is compliant with legislative and regulatory requirements. The job titles have also been updated where applicable.
Version 5	January 2013	Amendments in light of reform of welfare benefits. Reference to differing practice in different local authority areas.
Version 4	May 2010	Removal of housing for older people, changes to applicants aged under 18 and removal of reference to Huddersfield
Version 3	March 2009	Changes to Housing For Older People
Version 2	October 2007	
Version 1	February 2006	

A charitable housing association

1 Introduction

This policy establishes the approach that Connect Housing will take to the allocation of our homes. This policy is underpinned by the Associations values and aims.

2 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Association will work within the spirit and guidance of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy to rehouse people who reflect the diversity of the communities in which we work. We will monitor the rehousing of applicants from BME backgrounds and, wherever possible, we will offer support to applicants who have particular needs, with the aim of creating sustainable tenancies.

The Association will ensure that all our mobility procedures comply with our EDI Policy by ensuring fair access to our homes and fair treatment of all applicants in accordance with all appropriate statutory guidance.

Many people come to us because they have experienced discrimination and disadvantage in the housing and employment markets. We have the power to reduce some of those disadvantages by making our practices and services responsive to community and individual needs.

3 Ways to Access our Lettings Service

To ensure that our aims are met, the Association will provide a range of ways in which customers can access our lettings services:

- The Association will make contributions to the local authority strategies in the areas that we operate in. Where applicable the Association will participate in the common housing registration systems, including choice based lettings schemes where they exist
- Connect Housing Association waiting list (that applicants can apply to directly or that may be replenished through nominations from local authorities and other sources) ***Please note; as of 13/02/19 all new applications for the internal waiting**

list have been suspended. This is in anticipation of an updated waiting list being introduced in conjunction with the implementation of a new internal software system.*

- Through internet based mutual exchange systems (currently House Exchange), and other local or national mobility schemes
- Through the promotion and facilitation of home ownership where appropriate, for instance through shared ownership schemes and local lettings policies

The Association will provide information for applicants about all mobility options in which they are interested. Staff will be trained to give advice and information to applicants on the mobility options available. Staff will also assist applicants with the completion of application forms and will be sensitive and supportive of diverse needs in doing so including facilitating digital access.

The Association recognises it has a duty to assist the local authorities with which we work to discharge their housing functions, particularly to the homeless. We will have nominations agreements with each of the local authorities in which we work that include the proportion of lettings we aim to make to applicants who are nominated by those local authorities. The Association also recognises that housing need is not limited to homelessness and that in the communities that we operate there are other levels of priority that exist. In response to this we will also make lettings to applicants who have not been accorded (or who have lost) homelessness priority by local authorities to help us to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups. We will source applicants in a variety of ways to ensure we facilitate the creation and maintenance of balanced and sustainable communities.

The Association seeks to assist our own tenants who are in need of rehousing. We may do this through helping them to transfer to another property owned by the association if they are eligible to do so (they have been a tenant for more than 12 months, with no rent arrears, no legal action, no history of anti-social behaviour and they have looked after their property well). We will seek to prioritise transfers and mutual exchanges to reduce under occupation where affordability is causing difficulties for the tenant. In such cases we may, in certain circumstances, allow a tenant to transfer or exchange if they are in rent arrears.

4 How we Measure Housing Need

The Association uses an allocation system which measures relative need. Priority will be awarded for the following criteria:

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- Security of tenure
 - Property size and suitability
 - Property condition
 - Access to amenities
 - Health and mobility considerations
 - Other housing requirements

Priority will be awarded to each individual application according to the housing related circumstances described on the application form together with any supporting documentation. Information will be checked to ensure the priority is correct and it may be changed as a result of new information provided.

We will interview applicants, prior to making offers of rehousing, to ensure that the information on which our decisions are based is accurate and up to date. We will also use interviews to ensure that we are aware of any support needs that may affect the sustainability of a proposed tenancy and that we have explored ways in which we can address those needs (either through provision of support ourselves or through links with relevant voluntary and statutory agencies). We will seek to verify all relevant details provided by an applicant and this will include previous tenancy checks, proof of ID, proof of right to public funding and any other checks as and when required. We seek to take up references from previous landlords and other bodies, prior to offering a tenancy, but recognise that not all applicants can provide references and so will not always make our offers dependant upon a suitable reference.

Allocation decisions will usually be based on the level of priority for each shortlisted applicant. However, in the interests of meeting the needs of applicants and of creating and maintaining sustainable communities, allocations may be made out of priority order. These decisions will be recorded in the shortlisting documentation with the reasons provided. No account will be taken of the length of time an applicant has been registered on the waiting list or local housing register, except in cases of identical housing need.

5 The Association's Lettings Strategies

In order to achieve sustainable communities, we will:

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- ensure that the number of children living on an estate is sustainable
 - use local lettings initiatives – see below
 - offer properties to lower priority applicants
 - advertise the availability of properties including using commercial property websites
 - selectively use choice-based lettings schemes where these exist
 - consider, and where appropriate prioritise, internal transfer requests
 - use fast track letting processes for properties that may be hard to let or that are in lower demand
 - set property criteria – see below
 - adopt marketing strategies to attract applicants who are under-represented within the communities in which we work
 - in light of welfare reform, take into consideration the affordability of each allocation for the applicant

Examples of local lettings initiatives might be:

- seeking a higher percentage of working families to help to promote a mixture of household types within an area
- allocations to applicants with direct links to the relevant local area
- seeking a high number of local authority nominations in order that the existing community feel “ownership” of a new development

Examples of property criteria might be :

- Balance child density through restricting the number of lets to households with children
- Specify age, disability or support needs for certain properties

An objective criteria will be agreed at the pre- allocations meetings and will not subjectively exclude a particular applicant.

Applicants should be contacted by both email and telephone where those contact details are available. In all cases where we have contacted potential applicants we will expect a response by 10am the next available working day. A secondary phone call and/or email should be made before the 10am deadline to eliminate any potential errors made when dialling or inputting email addresses. Where we do not

receive any communication within this timescale we shall assume the applicant does not wish to proceed with their application. The LLA will then proceed to contact further applicants.

6 Access to Waiting List – Exclusions and Cancellations

Please note; as of 13/02/19 all new applications for the internal waiting list have been suspended. This is in anticipation of an updated waiting list being introduced in conjunction with the implementation of a new internal software system.

We may seek information about applicants from other agencies (including current and previous landlords). We will seek the applicant's consent to do this. The applicant does not have to give permission for us to seek this information but failure to give this permission may result in termination of the applicant's application for housing with the Association. If an applicant fails to disclose information that has been requested on the application form or during an interview, we may cancel their application to the waiting list, withdraw an offer of accommodation, or if the applicant has been rehoused, take appropriate legal action.

If after investigation, we are satisfied that the information received is sufficient and factual and falls within the criteria listed below, an applicant may be precluded from future vacancies. Recommendations to preclude an applicant can be made by any member of the Neighbourhood and Communications Directorate, but usually by a member of the lettings team, to the Lettings and Leasehold Manager who then makes the decision. The lettings team will notify the applicant of the decision and provide the reasons for that decision. All decisions will be documented and kept on file for 6 months beyond the expiry of the suspension date. Any appeal against a decision should be made in accordance with the appeals process.

We may suspend applications for appropriate periods up to 2 years. However, if the reason for exclusion is of an extremely serious nature, a risk assessment will be carried out, taking into account support available and other agency involvement, to determine if the exclusion should last for any period beyond the 2 years deemed to be reasonable in the circumstances. Applicants will be told how long their application has been suspended for and what they have to do to be reconsidered. They may be given advice regarding alternative options and where to seek further advice from e.g. housing advice centres. Applicants will be expected to contact the

Association at the end of the suspension period to request their application is reconsidered.

Applications will be restricted for certain categories of applicant. These include the following:

- Those whose capital and savings will enable them to meet their housing need on the open market
- Those who have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant. Applications may be suspended for anti-social behaviour and harassment, criminal activity (on a risk assessment), former tenant debt or mortgage arrears with a history of non payment, property damage or neglect and the provision of insufficient or deliberately misleading information.
- Those applicants from abroad who are illegal entrants or who have illegally overstayed past the date given on their visa
- Those applicants who have no right to public funds
- Those applicants who have support needs that would render their tenancy unsustainable and for whom the Association and other statutory and voluntary agencies are unable to provide an appropriate level of support to address those needs
- Those applicants who only require accommodation on a temporary basis (less than 6 months). However, we will continue to provide shorthold tenancies through our temporary homeless schemes, housing support schemes and in certain areas where we have properties that are difficult to let
- Those applicants who do not have sufficient income or recourse to public funds to pay the rent and sustain a tenancy. However, all applicants will be given appropriate advice about their eligibility for housing and other benefits
- Those under the age of 16 years

Applications to the Association's waiting list may also be cancelled for the following reasons:

- the applicant has failed to respond to correspondence from us
- the applicant has been rehoused
- the applicant has given false information in an attempt to obtain a tenancy fraudulently or has deliberately altered their circumstances in order to improve their chances of being rehoused. This includes people who relinquish their tenancy and move into substandard accommodation

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- the applicant has contravened any of the Association's policies, revealed in references or from other sources or in information given at interview

Each case will be considered on its merits. Applicants who have been refused access to our waiting list or who feel that their needs have not been properly assessed have the right of appeal against those decisions. They will always be advised of the reasons for any decision to exclude them and their appeals will be heard by staff who were not involved in that decision.

7 Rehousing of Staff, Contractors, Board Members and Relatives

When considering applications for rehousing from staff, contractors, Board members and relatives, Connect Housing will comply with its internal probity policy and procedures.

Where an application is made in this instance, the relevant manager and Corporate Secretary should be contacted to invoke and seek approval for the request as part of the probity procedure. The criteria which permits the housing in these circumstances specifies that:

- The employee has no involvement in or influence over the process by which we allocate the tenancy in question
- The person demonstrates that appropriate alternative sources of housing are not available, and
- The applicant fully meets published criteria for allocating housing

The employee or relative requesting housing must complete a Declaration of Interests pro-forma which is passed to the Corporate Secretary. The Chief Executive will seek approval from the Chair to use the exemption before approving the declaration. This will then be minuted at the next available Board meeting and recorded in the Public Register of Exemptions.

Once approved the Association will treat the application exactly the same as those of all other applicants. In addition to the tenancy commencement forms being signed

and checked by the LLM, any forms must also be countersigned by the Neighborhood Services Manager before processing.

8 Applicants under 18 years old

No-one under 16 years old can legally be offered a tenancy. Applicants between 16 and 18 should be regarded as vulnerable and their support needs should be taken into account in the interests of creating a sustainable tenancy.

Any young person aged 16 or 17 will only be offered an equitable tenancy in circumstances where they have an agency working with them such as Social Services or another support provider. The agency must be both willing and able to act as a trustee and guarantor acting always in the best interests of the young person until they reach the age of 18 and are able to hold the legal estate of the property in their own name.

9 Appeals

Any customer wishing to appeal against a decision made with regard to their application should do so in writing to the Association within 21 days of receiving the decision that gives rise to their appeal. Should an applicant subsequently wish to complain about the way in which their appeal has been treated, or should they wish to make a complaint about our failure to comply with the terms of this policy or our published service standards they can do so in accordance with the Association's Complaints Policy.

10 Confidentiality

We may seek information about applicants from other agencies and we will seek the applicant's consent to do this. The applicant does not have to give permission for us to seek this information although failure to give this permission may result in termination of the application for housing with the Association.

We will treat any information received about the applicant in confidence. However information provided may be used to detect and prevent fraud and/or used for statistical surveys.

Applicants may view personal information in relation to their rehousing application. The applicant must make this request in writing. Applicants will not be allowed access to third party information supplied in confidence to the Association. We may charge an administration fee to applicants who ask to view the information we hold about them. That fee will usually only be levied if the applicant asks for copies of the information held about them and the amount of information requested is significant.

11 Transfers

We will consider requests from our existing tenants for rehousing if the tenant has a housing need which we are realistically able to meet. Tenants may be asked to express an interest in a transfer through bidding for properties advertised in choice based lettings schemes or other media.

Applications for transfers will only be considered if the applicant has been a tenant in their current property for at least 12 months. This time limit may be waived in exceptional circumstances (e.g. racial harassment or fleeing violence etc), although additional written documentation will be needed to support the request (e.g. from a social worker or the police). A transfer within the first 12 months of a tenancy may also be authorised in cases of underoccupancy where a tenant is subject to a shortfall in housing benefit. The decision to consider a transfer in such circumstances will be made by the relevant lettings staff. We will seek to prioritise transfers to reduce under occupation where affordability is causing difficulties for the tenant. In such cases we may, in certain circumstances, allow a tenant to transfer if they do not hold the highest priority or are in rent arrears. All such decisions will be duly recorded.

Any decision to reject an application will be made by the relevant lettings staff. A transfer may be refused on any of the grounds stated in this policy under the Access to Housing section. These include current and former tenant rent arrears, sundry debts or breaches of the tenancy agreement. Prior to an offer of a property, a surveyor will carry out an inspection of the transfer applicant's property to ascertain if there are any tenant repairs required and to assess the condition of the property as a whole. Where it is clear that there are tenant repairs required to bring the property to a lettable standard, then the application will either be cancelled or deferred until such time as the work has been completed to the Association's satisfaction. This may be waived in exceptional circumstances for example where the applicant is fleeing violence etc. In such

circumstances the tenant must sign an agreement to pay for the Association carrying out the work (instalments can be agreed) prior to the transfer being approved. If the tenant wishes to appeal against the transfer decision they may follow the appeals process set out in the Appeals and Complaints section of this policy.

12 Monitoring

The Association will monitor:

- Lettings profiles for all lettings e.g. age group, household composition
- Void rent loss
- Average relet time, split into time in repair and time in letting
- Reasons for leaving, refusing offers and for rehousing
- Allocations to nominable groups against the target
- The sustainability of introductory tenancies during the introductory period

An annual report to the Board of Management will provide information about activity in the areas outlined above.