

# Lettings Policy

## **Scope of Policy**

This Policy sets out our approach when allocating our rented homes.

## **Applicability**

The Policy applies to all members of Platform Housing Group (the Group).

### **1. Policy Statement**

- 1.1 The Group will provide homes for rent to those in housing need in the areas where we own and manage properties.
- 1.2 We will allocate our homes in a fair, transparent and equitable manner, working together with the local authorities in the areas in which we operate to support their strategic housing functions and sustainable communities and enable them to fulfil their statutory duties under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002, as amended.

### **2. Context**

- 2.1 Our Vision is to “Make a difference by enabling better lives through building better homes” and our Mission is to “Build a better future by investing in affordable homes, services and communities”. Our Strategic Plan 2018-2023 details how we aim to deliver 2,000 new homes each year to 2023. It is therefore paramount that we operate a Lettings Policy which clearly sets out the principles we will adopt when letting both new homes and re-letting existing homes.
- 2.2 We will take into account the conditions contained within the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, together with all other relevant legislation and statutory guidance, to ensure sustainable tenancies.

### **3. Aims and objectives**

- 3.1 Through this policy we will:
  - Work closely with local authorities in the areas in which we operate in order to meet local housing priorities;
  - Let our homes in a fair, transparent and consistent manner;
  - Provide reasonable choice to those in housing need;
  - Aim to achieve sustainable and balanced communities;
  - Make best use of our housing stock;
  - Enable mobility between homes and areas through mutual exchange and transfers;
  - Be accountable by providing clear information about our decisions and have in place, and provide information regarding our appeals

process, where we have declined an applicant (see Appendix 1 – Employee Guidance);

- Comply with the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation and hold all information regarding our customers and applicants for housing in a secure manner; and
- Work actively to tackle and rectify social housing fraud, if an applicant withholds or provides false information which has resulted in their obtaining accommodation.

## 4. Policy outline

- 4.1 As members of the Group are **charitable organisations**, we predominantly house charitable beneficiaries, and let properties according to the objects of each association.
- 4.2 We have **nomination agreements** with our Local Authority partners and usually advertise our vacancies through their Choice Based Lettings systems (CBL), all of whom have their own allocations policy which is published by each CBL partnership. Our procedures and guidelines clearly outline how we will let our homes.
- 4.3 On **new developments** we will generally consider nominations from Local Authorities for 100% of the properties. However, where planning conditions are not restrictive, we may allocate new properties via other methods.
- 4.4 The Group will, where appropriate, work in partnership with local authorities to develop **local lettings plans** in order to improve or maintain the sustainability of communities.
- 4.5 Applicants aged 55 and over with specific support needs are able to apply for accommodation at our **Independent Living Schemes** (dependent on the criteria for the specific scheme). We may consider an application from a younger person if their care or mobility needs are evidenced from a support assessment.
- 4.6 Applicants aged 60 and over are able to apply for our **Supported Housing** accommodation. Applicants for our extra care schemes, aged under 60 and whom have an identified care need will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 4.7 The Group will accept **applications from those over the age of 16 years** but will not normally offer a tenancy until they reach the age of 18 years, except in exceptional circumstances and this would normally require a rent guarantor. The guarantor can be a responsible adult over 18 years of age, known to the applicant or an agency such as Children’s Services.
- 4.8 Where a young person qualifies for assistance under the **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000**, the Local Authority Children’s Services team would be expected to meet their housing costs until they reach the age of 18.

- 4.9 Allocations at our **Extra Care** and **Very Sheltered Housing Schemes, Foyers** and any other specialist housing schemes will be carried out by review teams with an agreed allocations policy and allocations panel.
- 4.10 Existing customers who have an urgent and exceptional need to move to a more suitable adapted home due to illness or disability, will with the authorisation of a Regional Manager, be transferred outside of our normal allocation routes through the Groups Management Move register. Applicants that require **adapted housing** and have applied through the local authority Choice Based Lettings Scheme, may be given additional priority. Where adapted housing is no longer required, we will consult with any remaining household members to consider alternative housing options and will, with the authorisation of the Housing Manager be offered suitable alternative accommodation outside of the normal allocation routes.
- 4.11 There may be other occasions where **exceptional circumstances** create the need for urgently rehousing an existing customer, i.e. domestic abuse, racial abuse, threat to life or serious risk of harm. These 'management moves' will be considered on a case by case basis, will require the authorisation of a Regional Manager and may need the agreement of the local authority. The approved 'management move' applicant will receive up to two reasonable offers and will remain valid for a period of up to three months – (see Management Move procedure).
- 4.12 Members of the Group will grant **succession** to tenancies in accordance with current legal requirements and best practice. Under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1988, a tenant's spouse, person living with them as their spouse or as their civil partner, is granted a statutory right of succession. The Group has also included additional express rights in their tenancy agreements which specifically allow other persons to succeed a tenancy as a statutory right. However, the Law stipulates that for statutory succession only one succession per tenancy is allowed. (Appendix 1 – Employee Guidance).
- 4.13 Where local nomination arrangements with our Local Authority partners **fail to identify any applicant** for a property, we may contact other agencies or use direct marketing initiatives to identify a suitable tenant. In these circumstances, consideration will also be given to applicants who would in other circumstances not be eligible for the property in question. Any consideration will have due regard to the circumstances of the applicant, sustainability of the tenancy and the existing residents in neighbouring properties.
- 4.14 Other housing options offered by the Group include Mutual Exchanges, Market Rent, Home Ownership, Rent to Homebuy (separate Policies and Procedures detail our approach).
- 4.15 Group Board Members, Tenant Advisors, employees, or their relatives, will only be offered housing following approval by the Group Executive Team and in accordance with the respective Code of Conduct and Probity Policy.

## **5. Equality and Diversity**

- 5.1 We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, family circumstances or offending history, as referred to in our relevant Group policies. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly.
- 5.2 Assistance will be provided to anyone who may need help to make an application, or needs information in an alternative language or formats, i.e. braille, large print, audio.

## **6. Access to Personal Information**

- 6.1 Under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation, applicants have a legal right to inspect their housing application file or computer record. In both instances, access to this information can only be withheld where the information has been provided by a third party and their consent to the disclosure of that information has not been obtained.

## **7. Monitoring and review**

- 7.1 We will monitor the effectiveness of this policy through relevant performance information which will be reported through the relevant Group Management Team.
- 7.2 This policy will be reviewed every three years or on the introduction of new legislation or best practice guidelines, whichever is the sooner.
- 7.3 The Group will fully comply with the Regulatory Requirements of CORE (continuous recording of lettings) and will use this data to monitor and analyse of performance in order to identify trends and any continuous improvement opportunities.

## **8. Associated documents / policies**

- 8.1 List of documents/associated policies/publications:
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
  - Localism Act 2011
  - Immigration Act 2014
  - Allocation of accommodation: Guidance for Local Housing Authorities in England
  - The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England
  - the Group's Tenancy Management Policy
  - the Group's General Data Protection Regulations Policy
  - the Group's Mutual Exchange Policy
  - the Group's Complaints, Comments & Compliments Policy
  - the Group's Aids and Adaptations Policy
  - the Group's Affordable Rents Policy

- the Group's Rent to Homebuy Policy
- the Group's Market Rent Policy
- the Group's Dignity at Work Policy
- the Group's Management Move Procedures

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<b>Version:</b>	Final Version 2 (amended by Sarah Sutton effective from 10/06/2020)
<b>Release date:</b>	August 2019
<b>Next Review date:</b>	July 2022
<b>Document type:</b>	Policy
<b>Approved by:</b>	Risk & Performance Forum
<b>EIA/PIA Completed: (where required)</b>	Y/Y
<b>Customer consultation: (where appropriate)</b>	Y/N
<b>Employee Handbook amends: (where appropriate)</b>	Y/N