



ALLOCATIONS AND LETTING POLICY GENERAL NEEDS

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ALLOCATIONS POLICY (GENERAL NEEDS)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy explains the approach we take in allocating and letting our properties.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 As a small social housing provider of supported accommodation, we are committed in ensuring the process of letting our properties is as fair, efficient and transparent as possible. In doing so we work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to meet local housing need and prevent homelessness. We aim to empower vulnerable residents to sustain their tenancies by effectively and responsibly letting our homes.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 Granville Community Homes Limited (GCH) has an obligation to assist local authorities so far as it is reasonable, to offer accommodation to people in priority need under the local authority letting schemes.

- 3.2 This Policy has taken into account the following key legislation:

- The Housing Act 1996 (As amended) - Part 6
- The Housing Act 1985
- The Homelessness Act 2002
- The Homelessness reduction Act 2017
- Immigration Act 2014
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Welfare reform Act 2012
- Data Protection Act 2018 (GDPR)
- Equalities Act 2010
- Housing Regulators Tenancy Standard
- The localism Act 2011
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Local Government Act 2000

- 3.3 This policy and associated procedures also comply with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Tenancy Standard.

4. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 This policy applies to the allocation and letting of all General Needs accommodation owned and managed by GCH.
- 4.2 The objective of this policy is to allocate rented properties to make the best use of the available housing stock, support the long-term sustainability of tenancies and communities and to meet our requirements in assisting local authorities in their housing duties.

5. NOMINATIONS AND REFERRALS

- 5.1 GCH will request and accept nominations and referrals from our partners in accordance with the nominations agreements and eligibility criteria set out within this policy.
- 5.2 Each nomination and referral is carefully considered before an offer of housing is made in order to ensure that the property is suitable for the proposed occupier. We may need to request additional information from the nominating local authority, statutory agency or referral charity to support a nomination. Additional information will include, but not limited to medical evidence, risk assessments, occupational therapist reports, tenancy history from previous landlords and eviction dates (for those facing homelessness).
- 5.3 On some occasions it may be necessary to reject a nomination from a partner organisation or authority. Grounds for rejection vary, but may include submission of inaccurate or insufficient information, unsuitability of property for the applicant's needs or applicant's inability to sustain the tenancy. We do not take into account factors such as perceived housing management difficulties when deciding to accept or reject a nomination.

- 5.4 We work with the local authority and other agencies in cases where the applicant has a history of serious offences, for example: arson, drug use or sexual assault. We have a separate policy covering the housing of serious offenders. This seeks to ensure that everyone has fair and equal access to housing but also to enable us to manage the potential risk posed by serious offenders, and hence protect residents and local communities from offences.
- 5.5 If an applicant refuses an offer of accommodation we ask them to give their reasons for refusing and record the reasons. These details are included in any reports to nominating partners.
- 5.6 GCH will work collaboratively with our partners to verify any information given by applicants to ensure that our housing is allocated and let according to the appropriate priorities.

Nomination Agreements

- 5.7 Nomination agreements are an arrangement whereby a certain proportion of homes provided by a housing association are allocated to applicants (nominations) proposed by another body, such as a local authority, for the purpose of an offer of housing.
- 5.8 Access to housing is largely managed with partners using nomination agreements, referral arrangements or choice based lettings schemes. We work with our partners to verify any information given by applicants to ensure that our housing is allocated and let according to the appropriate priorities.
- 5.9 We are committed to working with local authorities in order to assist them with their statutory duties in relation to homeless and those in priority need. We work with partners and agencies to reach an agreement on the proportion of empty homes to be offered to nominations. This proportion varies according to local arrangements.
- 5.10 We also work with partners to enable move-on accommodation for applicants living in supported accommodation.

Choice based lettings (CBL)

- 5.11 CBL refers to a way of letting homes which allows applicants living in certain local authorities, including existing tenants who want to transfer, to apply for accommodation. Applicants are awarded a banding through the use of 'priority banding', which prioritises applicants with an urgent need to move. Applicants can see the full range of available properties, which are advertised widely, and can bid for any home to which they are matched. CBL is available through your local authority.

Referral with specialist agencies

- 5.12 A number of properties are made available to referral agencies with which we have an agreement. Agreements are made with both voluntary and statutory agencies in order to help residents with particular needs to secure housing. Agencies include homeless charities, domestic abuse support programmes, local health authorities, social services, adult social care and the police.
- 5.13 The most effective route for households applying for social housing is through the local authority housing register. However, for some of our schemes we also operate an open waiting list or direct access.

Re-lets

- 5.14 We aim to make available a proportion of our properties to existing tenants transferring to another home. We will use these properties to accommodate the following.
- Tenants who have an urgent need to move on medical grounds
 - Tenants moving to independent living from supported housing
 - Households who are overcrowded or under-occupied
 - To support balances and sustainable communities through a local lettings plan
 - **Decants**. This is where there is an urgent need to move an existing tenant because of major works or to allow for the redevelopment of the scheme. Further information is provided in our decant policy.

- 5.15 We will advertise these homes, with the exception of direct offers through choice based lettings.

6. TEMPORARY ALLOCATIONS

- 6.1 Temporary allocations of property will not be considered an allocation of property under this policy. For example, where an existing tenant has been decanted to an alternative property on a temporary basis. Please see our decants policy for further guidance.

7. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

- 7.1 We seek to provide housing for those who are not adequately served by the commercial housing market. Our aim is to let our homes to those in most need. All applicants must meet our eligibility criteria set out below.
- 7.2 We follow all current legal and regulatory requirements in assessing applications from people subject to immigration control.

8. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA (NEW ENTRANTS)

- 8.1 Applicants must:
- have a housing need
 - be over 18 years of age, however we will house 16 or 17 year olds where they have a guarantor in place or where social services has a support plan in place
 - have leave to remain in the UK and recourse to public funds and not be subject to immigration control or be a European Economic Area (EEA) national exercising their treaty rights
 - not own their home or their own residential accommodation elsewhere
 - not hold another tenancy elsewhere
 - not currently be serving a custodial sentence
 - have not been previously evicted for breach of tenancy from a GCH property, including anti-social behaviour, non-payment of rent or charges, tenancy fraud or misrepresentation.
 - not known to have or members of their household are known to have

caused serious anti- social behaviour e.g. have been evicted or convicted due to antisocial behaviour.

- not have outstanding debts to GCH as a result of failure to pay rent, court costs, rechargeable repairs or any other debt
- be able to demonstrate that they can sustain a tenancy and manage risk, with support where required, including afford to pay the rent
- be nominated, or bid, for the appropriate size property that they are eligible for using our bedroom standard
- pass an affordability assessment
- not have been successfully prosecuted for tenancy fraud
- not be in arrears with their previous landlord, or if in arrears must have an active payment plan in place

9. LOCAL LETTING PLANS

9.1 We will introduce local lettings plans to address housing management issues and to help develop a sustainable community in a specific area. We adopt tailored eligibility criteria for these lets, which take into account the needs of a defined area in terms of building a balanced and sustainable community, rather than concentrating on meeting housing needs alone.

9.2 Where we adopt a local lettings plan, we consult with partner organisations including the local authority(ies) to ensure that the plan reasonably balances the competing demands of local housing need and the desire to address the specific issues in the locality. Local lettings plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the initial aims.

10. SENSITIVE LETTINGS

10.1 Where there has been a housing management issue at a specific property, we may decide to treat the letting of that property as a sensitive let. Rather than concentrating on housing needs alone, we take into account other factors, such as support needs, when determining if an applicant is eligible to apply and the property is suitable.

10.2 By carrying out a sensitive let, we allocate the property to the most appropriate, priority applicant. Details of any sensitive let are fully recorded on housing management files.

11. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA (EXISTING RESIDENTS)

11.1 A transfer applicant must:

- have a housing need
- be able to demonstrate that they can sustain a tenancy in the new home, with support where required, including afford to pay rent
- have no outstanding debts to GCH, including rent, court costs or charges
- be an assured, or fixed term tenant
- have maintained the property in good condition
- have complied with the terms of their tenancy
- to apply for the appropriate size property that they are eligible for using our bedroom standard

11.2 In exceptional cases, we consider requests to transfer where a tenant does not fulfil the criteria set out here. Exceptions for tenants with rent arrears or facing legal action are considered through our management transfer process.

12. HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

12.1 Eligible household members include a person who is included as part of the household on the original tenancy file or is recorded as being added to the household (e.g. children).

12.2 We investigate and verify applications where intentional overcrowding has occurred. We expect potential adult household members to supply evidence that the tenancy address is their main and principal home. We reserve the right to determine the appropriate property size for applications that include additional household members.

13. TRANSFERS

13.1 We consider transfer requests from tenants who wish to move from their current home because it is no longer suitable for their needs. Some residents do not have the right to transfer, including licensees and assured shorthold

tenants.

14. MANAGEMENT TRANSFERS

- 14.1 A management transfer can be requested by a tenant who requires a move due to a serious housing management issue, domestic violence, harassment or severe financial hardship. An offer of accommodation will be made through CBL.
- 14.2 We assess each case on its merit and must be satisfied that problems causing the transfer request will be alleviated by a move to a new home. We request evidence of any risk through reports provided by external agencies, such as the police, the GP or social services.
- 14.3 The local authority award priority banding based on the evidence provided and their assessment of the case. Where a transfer is granted due to domestic abuse and the perpetrator and victim of domestic abuse are joint tenants, we offer a new tenancy to the victim and seek possession of the property.
- 14.4 We regularly review all management transfers after they are approved to confirm that the tenant's circumstances remain the same and they still require priority status.

15. DIRECT OFFERS

- 15.1 In cases where a tenant faces an imminent risk by remaining in their home, and has provided evidence of this, we may make a reasonable direct offer. A direct offer is a single offer of an available property made directly to the tenant, not through CBL. A reasonable offer is one that alleviates the imminent risk to the household by moving them to a different location.
- 15.2 The direct offer and the property the tenant moves from will be like-for-like, with the same number of bedrooms. We do not consider housing circumstances such as overcrowding when making a direct offer. In cases where, due to unavailability, we have been unable to find a like-for-like property within three months, we consider offering a similar property.
- 15.3 We only make one direct offer. Where a tenant refuses a reasonable direct offer, we consider whether the transfer request can be dealt with as a management transfer.

16. UNDER OCCUPATION

- 16.1 We recognise that the welfare reforms and the size criteria will adversely affect some of our tenants and may lead to financial hardship. We will support tenants to move to accommodation most appropriate to their needs and financial circumstances, wherever possible.

17. TRANSFER APPLICANTS WITH NO PRIORITY NEED

- 17.1 We do not consider transfer requests from tenants who do not present a priority need. We offer tenants who have no priority need advice about appropriate housing options including mutual exchange, shared ownership, and market rent opportunities with other housing partners.
- 17.2 Our housing staff provide support to residents wishing to mutual exchange and offer practical support in registering with national online portal Homeswapper.

18. TENANCY TYPE AND RENT LEVEL

Fixed term tenancy

- 18.1 Applicants who have not held a tenancy before are issued with a minimum five-year fixed term tenancy. This type of tenancy will have an additional initial 1 year probationary period. Existing residents and residents from another landlord transferring to a property advertised as a fixed term tenancy will retain their security of tenure, where their original tenancy was granted before 1 April 2012 e.g. periodic assured tenancy for life.

19. PROPERTY ALLOCATION CRITERIA

- 19.1 When allocating a property, we take into account the household size of the applicant, the support needs of the applicant and the type of property being let to determine whether the property is suitable for the applicant.

Bedroom size

- 19.2 When allocating homes we observe Part X of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to statutory overcrowding. We take account of the number, and floor area, of rooms available for sleeping, and allocate properties to the appropriate sized household.

Bedroom Standard

- 19.3 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 included the Department of Work and Pension (DWP) social sector size criteria, which introduced housing benefit reductions for working age tenants who are considered to be under- occupying their homes. Our allocation criteria reflect the social sector size criteria. We allow for one bedroom for each person (single adult) or couple living as a household and an extra bedroom for:
- any other person aged 16 years or over
 - two children of the same gender under the age of 16
 - two children who are under the age of 10 regardless of gender
 - a child or adult who requires overnight care from a non-resident carer
 - a child or adult who is unable to share a bedroom because of disability
 - a foster child where the resident is an approved foster carer, whether they have a child placed with them or not (as long as they have been approved or had a placement in the last 12 months).

Adapted properties

- 19.4 In line with our policy on adaptations, properties which have been specially adapted for use by those with disabilities are, wherever possible, re-cycled to a resident with a disability or a support need to ensure best use of stock.

Affordability

- 19.5 All applicants are required to undergo an affordability assessment to ensure that the rent is affordable. We aim to meet the objective that no household should pay in excess of 40% of their net household income on housing costs (rent including other charges owed to GCH).

- 19.6 Whilst we accept that this may not be achieved in all cases, where a household will be paying in excess of 40% of their net household income, the property is considered unaffordable unless the applicant can demonstrate through the affordability assessment the ability to meet their financial obligations, to sustain rent payments and meet other essential living costs.

Tenancy Support

- 19.7 We aim to create sustainable tenancies. Where appropriate we carry out needs assessments to identify who may require additional assistance at the start of their tenancy to establish a new home. By offering this support we aim to reduce the incidence of failed tenancies and subsequent homelessness.
- 19.8 Support may be provided by us or by referral to partner support agencies. Such support is not exclusive to new residents and can be available to residents at times throughout the tenancy where support needs arise that impact on the management or sustainment of a tenancy.

20. ACCEPTING AND REFUSING APPLICATIONS

- 20.1 We seek to let our homes in a responsible manner. We want to create sustainable tenancies and communities and avoid establishing tenancies that will fail. We may refuse to let a property where an applicant is unable to demonstrate their ability to manage their tenure or where the applicant needs a level of support which we or another provider cannot facilitate. Where we refuse an offer of accommodation, we give clear reasons why.

21. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

- 21.1 An applicant can appeal a decision if they are dissatisfied with the way their application, selection, offer or allocation has been handled. Appeals are considered by officers who were not involved in the original decision. If dissatisfied with the appeal decision, applicants are advised to follow our complaints process.

22. MONITORING AND TARGETS

- 22.1 We operate robust monitoring systems to ensure that our lettings service is fair and managed in accordance with regulation and strategic key performance indicators (KPIs).
- 22.2 We work closely with authorities to monitor our nomination arrangements and provide regular lettings data (LA 'returns'). The monitoring and provision of data may vary between local authorities. We provide standardised data to regulators as necessary and will participate in the Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) data collection.
- 22.3 We seek feedback from residents once they have moved into their new home to gauge their satisfaction of our lettings service.

23. RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

- 23.1 We will consult with any new and existing residents regarding our transfer lists and allocations process for feedback. Resident feedback will enable us to ensure that housing is allocated to those most in need, improve our service offer and void turnaround time.

24. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 24.1 In writing this policy we have carried out assessment to ensure that we are considering, equality, diversity and inclusion. Our assessments did not indicate that any group had been adversely impacted by our approach to allocations.
- 24.2 We have also carried out a privacy impact assessment as information regarding applicants is sensitive. However, responsible information sharing plays a key role in the letting of our homes. We follow information sharing protocols with local authorities and our partners where they are in place.
- 24.3 To request copies of these assessments, please contact info@granvillecommunityhomes.co.uk

25. RELATED INTERNAL POLICIES

- Equality and Diversity policy
- Health and safety policy
- Complaints policy and procedure
- General Data Protection policy
- Tenant Involvement policy
- Anti-social Behaviour policy
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Rent setting policy

This is non exhaustive list

26. CONSULTATION

- 26.1 This policy will be reviewed in consultation with GCH residents and key stakeholders.

27. REVIEW AND APPROVAL

- 27.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every two years or as required to take into account changes in legislation and local authority tenancy strategies.

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