

Onward Homes Lettings and Allocations Policy

1. Aim

- 1.1 This policy sets out how Onward Homes will make the best use of available housing, make lettings which are compatible with the purpose of the housing, contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and cooperate with local authorities to create sustainable communities. The methods for applying for housing and the process for decision-making are described.
- 1.2 This policy is aligned with the Regulatory Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing.
- 1.3 This policy aims to:
 - Comply with the regulatory framework, and other relevant legislation including the Equality Act 2010.
 - Make the best use of Onward Homes' properties.
 - Contribute to the creation of sustainable communities.
 - Assist Local Authority partners to meet their statutory duty in relation to the allocation of homes.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy sets out Onward Homes' approach to identifying new tenants for available general needs and sheltered social and affordable rented homes. We offer homes to people who fall within our charitable aims and whose housing needs are not adequately served by the private sector.

3. Methods of Allocating Homes

- 3.1 Onward Homes aim to allocate the vast majority of its homes through our partner Local Authority schemes using each local authorities' allocation policy to determine eligibility and priority.
- 3.2 Onward Homes has entered into Nomination Agreements with each of our Local Authority partners. These agreements set out how Onward Homes and the local authority will work together to assist those people on the Local Authority Housing Register. Onward Homes operates various arrangements based on the specific agreements in place with each of the Local Authorities we work with.
- 3.3 Each Local Authority policy adheres to the legal requirements of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and therefore meets all statutory requirements relating to eligibility and qualification for housing. Local Authority policies are framed to provide Reasonable Preference (i.e. a head-start) to those with housing need, and Onward Homes' participation with the Local Authority scheme therefore ensures that those with housing need have priority access to a proportion of homes.
- 3.4 People can apply for housing through their Local Authority Allocation Scheme. The Local Authority policy will usually describe the types of properties eligible applicants can apply for, how eligible applicants will be prioritised, and the method of allocating homes. The Local Authority's allocations criteria will also be overlaid with Onward Homes' own checks, to ensure applicants are suitable beneficiaries under its charitable aims. In most cases the Local Authority will use a web-based choice-based lettings system where customers can express interest in available homes, however some use a system of direct matching applicants to available properties.

3.5 Subject to its obligations to provide nominations under Local Authority schemes, Onward Homes may occasionally let some homes outside of the local scheme. Onward Homes will do this for the following reasons:

3.5.1 Special Projects

Onward Homes will occasionally enter into partnerships with local authorities and/or other stakeholders to make use of its properties for projects tackling issues such as homelessness, rehousing refugees, major regeneration projects etc. For any Special Project lettings Onward Homes will not apply the refusal criteria set out in this policy but will agree specific criteria for lettings eligibility with the project partners, although we will continue to conduct a financial assessment of all applicants to ensure they are capable of being a beneficiary under our charitable aims.

Onward Homes will co-operate with requests from the Home Office, government, or any local authority to house people with specialist housing requirements, for example people seeking a home under the National Witness Protection Scheme.

3.5.2 Sensitive Lettings

We may categorise a property, or properties, as requiring a sensitive let if we need to balance the lettings within a specific group of properties. This may occur where there has been an eviction, on-going anti-social behavior or where we have received a request from our statutory partners not to house certain individuals at a specific location. If a sensitive let is made outside of the local authority scheme, we will be clear in our advertisement the general nature of who we let our properties to, the parameters of our charitable status and how we will decide priority for the specific letting.

3.5.3 Low Demand

Where it is known that the property type available is unlikely to be allocated effectively through the Local Authority scheme due to low demand, Onward Homes will in tandem with the Local Authority Scheme advertise through direct marketing to maximise interest. We will let low demand homes on a first come first served basis subject to the applicant meeting the eligibility criteria set out in this policy. We will conduct a financial assessment of all applicants to ensure they are capable of being a beneficiary under our charitable aims.

3.5.4 Neighbourhood Sustainability – Local Lettings Plans

Where we have issues relating to the sustainability of a neighbourhood, we will develop a local letting plan to address these issues. Local Lettings Plans will be a time-limited intervention to adjust the standard allocations criteria in a specified neighbourhood or scheme or for a specified housing type in order to achieve specific outcomes. Full details of how allocations will be made will be set out in the specific Local Lettings Plan.

Onward Homes will use Local Lettings Plans in two ways:

1. To redress an imbalance or identified issues relating to tenancy sustainability.
2. To maximise the positive impact that the allocation of new build homes offers.

Local lettings Plans will be evidence based and will be reviewed regularly to assess effectiveness and suitability. Once a plan has achieved the intended outcome it should either be terminated immediately or the proportion of lets

it applies to should be reduced over time until it can be removed altogether.

If the local lettings plan is not having the impact intended then the approach should be reviewed and the policy amended or removed.

4. Eligibility for Housing

- 4.1 Applicants aged 18 or over will be eligible to apply to rent Onward Homes properties.
- 4.2 Applicants aged 16-17 will be eligible to apply through a CBL or via a Care Leavers Scheme, in both cases a Trustee and Guarantor must be in place.
- 4.3 Applicants for housing who have applied through the Local Authority scheme will usually already have been confirmed as being eligible for social housing. Onward Homes will undertake further checks prior to allocation to verify eligibility.
- 4.4 Applicants allocated properties outside of the Local Authority scheme will be subject to a Right to Rent check to ensure that they are eligible to rent a home. If an adult household member is found not to have a Right to Rent in the UK, the household will not be offered a home. More information about Right to Rent is available from the Government website www.gov.uk.
- 4.5 All Onwards supported housing and extra care schemes are allocated through local authority commissioning panels in partnership with care providers or managing agents. All customers must have had a care/support review by the social work team that determines their level of need. All allocations are conducted in this way.

5. Property Type Eligibility

- 5.1 Onward Homes will use the same property size eligibility criteria that is stated in the CBL. When allocating outside of the CBL we will use the property size edibility criteria below and assess benefit eligibility for assistance with housing costs. Using these rules, a separate bedroom is required for:
 - 5.1.1 a couple (aged 16 or over) who live together as partners.
 - 5.1.2 a single adult aged 21 and over.
 - 5.1.3 two children under 10 who are part of the same family.
 - 5.1.4 two children of the same sex under 21 who are part of the same family.
 - 5.1.5 any remaining children who cannot be paired according to the rules above.
- 5.2 In order to make the best use of the stock, Onward Homes will always seek to maximise the occupancy of a property according to these rules. However, there may be occasions where an allocation is made to a household who will under- occupy a property. Any such decision will be at the discretion of the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager who will first ensure that the property is affordable to the household, and secondly families with children as permanently resident will be given preference for houses over singles/ couples/parents with access only/adult children).
- 5.3 In areas of high demand Onward Homes may seek to identify customers who are under occupying family accommodation and offer help and support to enable customers to move to a home more suited to their requirements.
- 5.4 Older people's accommodation and sheltered housing must be allocated to a household that meets the age criteria of the scheme; all customers will contribute to all services provided at the scheme through a service charge.
 - 5.4.1 Tower blocks

Our approach to lettings at our high-rise blocks (considered to be 6 storeys or greater) is based on providing choice to customers, whilst allowing for a minimum compliance criterion for new lets in high rise blocks to manage vulnerability and risk. This minimum criterion includes the following cases:

- a. New residents need to be able to safely evacuate their property without assistance.
- b. New residents who require oxygen should not be housed above the first floor.

We will develop block-specific lettings plans for each of our high-rise blocks which may add additional criteria based on local conditions which support our Neighbourhood Plan objectives.

6. Allocations for Existing Customers and Emergency Transfers

- 6.1 We do not keep waiting lists as we encourage existing customers who wish to move to join their local housing register and/or seek a mutual exchange in order to maximise their chances of obtaining a property that meets their needs. We will however make homes available to existing customers by way of a management move to help us make best use of stock or an emergency transfer.
- 6.2 Emergency transfers will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is no longer safe for a customer to continue living in their home. Onward will ask for supporting evidence from (but not limited to) partner agencies such as Police, Social Services, other agencies to support any request for an emergency transfer. Examples of such circumstances include:
 - 6.2.1 Exceptional cases of Anti-Social Behavior and harassment, including serious or targeted hate crimes and serious racial harassment.
 - 6.2.2 In cases of Domestic Violence
 - 6.2.3 Where there are high risk Safeguarding concerns
 - 6.2.4 In tower blocks where a residents personal circumstances change, and it is no longer safe for them to continue living in the block.
 - 6.2.5 Emergency Health and Safety issues (i.e. Fire/flood/serious Damp and Mould cases)
 - 6.2.6 Medical conditions include delaying hospital discharge.
- 6.3 In these circumstances we will search our list of immediately available properties to try to find a new temporary or permanent home, which fulfils the housing needs of the customer, which may involve moving out of the local area.
- 6.4 The decision to make an offer of an emergency transfer will be made by the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager and should suitable property be available, one direct offer of suitable accommodation will be made.

7. Mutual Exchange

- 7.1 Onward Homes supports customers to exchange homes through mutual exchange, in accordance with the Tenancy Standard. Details of mutual exchanges can be found in our Mutual Exchange Procedure.

8. Withdrawal of Offers of Accommodation

- 8.1 There may be occasions where Onward Homes will withdraw an offer of accommodation. In the main there are 2 reasons where this is most likely to occur (although not limited to these):
- 8.1.1 Where an applicant is not in a position to take up the Tenancy within a reasonable timescale from the point of offer. It is anticipated that people looking to move will be in a position to do so and will be able to provide all relevant documents and take up the Tenancy within a reasonable timeframe. Onward Homes will advise applicants of this as early in the allocating process as possible. Vulnerabilities will be taken into account of which may affect an individual's ability to take up the tenancy within the expected timescales. Decisions will be at the discretion of the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager.
- 8.1.2 Where Onward Homes requires the property to address an emergency situation and it becomes necessary to withdraw an offer in order to facilitate this. There may be occasions where we require the property for emergency rehousing such as immediate life at risk cases. Decisions will be made in agreement with the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager.
- 8.2 All decisions to withdraw offers of accommodation will be at the discretion of the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager who will seek to balance reasonableness to the applicant against the reason for the potential withdrawal.

9. Refusals

- 9.1 Onward Homes takes a customer-focused approach to allocating homes and as such will try to identify an approach which allows a household to be made an offer of accommodation. However, there may be some circumstances where a household is not suitable for the property and in these cases Onward Homes may refuse to make an offer. The reasons for refusal include:

9.1.1 Debt

Where it is identified that an applicant has a current debt to Onward or a former housing related debt either owed to Onward Homes or another landlord the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager will consider the circumstances to form a decision on whether to allocate a property. Onward Homes will take into account the criteria set out in the relevant Local Authority area in deciding whether or not to refuse an offer of a property.

9.1.2 Affordability

In seeking to achieve our stated aim of creating sustainable communities, Onward Homes will carry out affordability checks prior to any formal offer of accommodation.

The aim of these checks is to identify any issues relating to an applicant's ability to pay their rent and service charge. We do this in order to support applicants and signpost them to money advice support services where needed to enable them to improve their financial situation so that the applicant may sustain a tenancy with us.

There may be times where, despite the appropriate engagement and support offered, it is felt that an applicant will not be able to afford to pay the rent and other charges on the property under consideration. In these situations, Onward Homes may refuse to make an offer of accommodation.

For any refusal due to affordability Onward Homes will provide advice and

guidance on the best route to a sustainable rehousing outcome in the future.

9.1.3 Antisocial Behavior

If there is evidence that the applicant/member of the household has been identified as perpetrating antisocial behaviour which makes them unsuitable to be a tenant in the property they have applied for, the application may be refused.

This will only be in circumstances where the nature and severity of the antisocial behaviour is considered to be a serious threat to Onward Homes' staff, customers or the community, this includes instances where applicants or members of their household have been abusive or used threatening behaviour towards Onward Homes' staff. Consideration will be given to how long ago the incidents occurred, whether there were factors involved which were related to the previous address, and how the individual has conducted themselves since.

9.1.4 Criminal Behavior

If an applicant/member of the household has been convicted of a 'serious offence' that is unspent, and they may pose a threat/risk to Onward Homes, the customers of Onward Homes or the community, the application may be refused.

Examples of 'serious offences' but not limited to, include:

- Public order offences, nuisance, vandalism
- Dealing, supplying or cultivating controlled drugs
- Burglary, robbery, theft
- Violence
- Indictable offences
- Offences relating to hate crimes.

Consideration will be given to how long ago the incidents occurred, whether there were factors involved which were related to the previous address, and how the individual has conducted themselves since the conviction.

9.1.5 Unmet Support Needs

Applicants with unmet support needs, where Onward Homes is unable to identify suitable and sufficient support, either within its own capacity or working with other agencies, may be refused tenancy. However, the aim will always be to find appropriate support to enable an allocation to be made.

9.1.6 False Information

If an applicant is found to have deliberately provided false information that is relevant to a housing application, or has deliberately withheld information, which has resulted in improved chances of being offered a home the applicant may be refused an offer of accommodation.

If the applicant is unable to provide us with sufficient information to satisfy us of their identity or right to rent we may refuse to offer accommodation.

9.1.7 Tenancy Breaches

Applicants may be refused where there is evidence that the applicant/member of the household has seriously breached a tenancy agreement or has behaved in a way that would constitute a breach of tenancy conditions for which it would be reasonable for a court to grant a possession order.

Examples, but not limited to, include:

- Not ending a tenancy in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement.
- Malicious damage to a property.
- Unwilling to comply with any imposed conditions of the offer, e.g. tenancy support.
- Eviction due to rent arrears.
- Eligibility and Sustainability

9.1.8 Investigation

An applicant may be refused an offer of accommodation where enquiries discover they are not eligible, or the property is inappropriate.

Examples, but not limited to, include:

- The property applied for is unsuitable to the applicant's needs, for example by way of adaptations, or services, or size.
- The applicant does not meet eligibility criteria for specific properties to ensure that we meet our obligations under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, covenants or other legal restrictions.
- The applicant is a person from abroad prescribed as ineligible by the Secretary of State
- Where the letting would conflict with Onward Homes' charitable objectives.

10. Lettings to Onward Homes' Employees

10.1 The details of lettings to Onward Homes' employees are set out in **Appendix 1**.

11. Exceptional Circumstances

11.1 There may be exceptional circumstances where it is appropriate to let a property outside of this policy. This will be at the discretion of the Neighbourhood Delivery Manager and will always be subject to the need to ensure all lettings are in accordance with Onward Homes' charitable status.

12. Review of Decision

12.1 If a customer wishes to appeal against their banding criteria they need to appeal to the Local Authority managing the CBL.

12.2 If a customer feels that they have not been treated fairly and in line with this policy, then the Customer Resolutions Policy should be followed.

13. Responsibility and monitoring

13.1 The Director of Housing & Specialists Living will be responsible for ensuring the policy is complied with.

Linked documents:	Local lettings plans Mutual Exchange Procedure Probity Policy
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Appendix 1 – Lettings to Employees and Connected People of Employees

Onward Homes employees and their connected people are invited to apply for homes in the same way as any applicant not working for the organisation. However, additional steps are taken to ensure that the allocation has been made fairly and that the individual is able to manage any conflicts between work and home. Connected people are relatives, partners or close associates of employees. This policy also applies to employees and connected people who are existing tenants looking for a transfer to another property.

General Needs Housing, Older People's Housing and Supported Housing

The employee will not be eligible for an allocation of Onward Homes property if they have had any involvement in the advertising, shortlisting or pre-tenancy work relating to the property. This includes allocations to connected people.

Where an Onward Homes employee or connected person is shortlisted for a property the relevant manager will be required to investigate the allocation to ensure that no employee has had any involvement in the housing application, that the property has been advertised correctly, to check the shortlisting or referral process, to thoroughly investigate any reasons for bypassing applicants with higher priority, and to review the applicants eligibility against any allocations criteria. Where properties are advertised through Rightmove or any similar route, the manager will ensure no preferential priority has been given to the employee or connected person.

If the investigation into the allocation is satisfactory then the manager will interview the employee to ensure that the individual has the ability to adequately manage the separation of their tenancy and employment responsibilities.

The Head of Neighbourhoods Services (HoNS) will review the outcome of both the allocations investigation and the interview and will make a decision about whether the allocation can be made. The HoNS will take full responsibility for the decision whether to allocate.

The decision made by the HoNS will be presented to their director for confirmation; however, the director will only overturn a decision if it is found that the process has been incorrect or insufficient. In some cases, it may be appropriate for the HoNS to put additional provisions in place such as ensuring that there is separation between the employee and the management of the neighbourhood in which the property is located. These recommendations will also be reported to the director. All decisions on rehousing employees should also be reported to the Head of Governance.

Where a decision is made to allocate a property to an employee the probity policy will be reissued to the employee and an additional declaration will be required as part of the sign-up process to confirm that it has been provided and that the employee understands the implications and agrees to the policy. A declaration of Interest must be declared through Our HR.