

WIRRAL METHODIST HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD



TENANT SELECTION & ALLOCATIONS
POLICY (WIRRAL & CHESHIRE WEST &
CHESTER)

2018 - 2021

WIRRAL METHODIST HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

TENANT SELECTION & ALLOCATION POLICY

(WIRRAL & CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER)

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1.0 Introduction

The Wirral Methodist Housing Association has 850 properties in management including three purpose built sheltered schemes primarily for people of pensionable age. Many of our properties are small two bedroom and three bedroom family houses; we have a number bungalows, including some which have been specially designed for people with physical disabilities; and a number of one and two bedroom flats, including flats over shops. During more recent years we have also developed many supported housing schemes for people with special needs. Some of these schemes are managed for us by various agencies including Wirral Women & Children's Aid and for others we work closely with care providers who support those with learning disabilities and mental health issues.

Our special needs schemes also include some Shared Ownership Schemes, specifically designed for People with Learning Disabilities, known as the SOLD model.

The majority of our properties are situated in areas of the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, mainly central Birkenhead, Seacombe, Rock Ferry and Woodchurch. We also have a very small number of properties in the Ellesmere Port area.

2. Our Aims

The Association exists to serve people with housing problems, the homeless, the inadequately housed and the elderly. Our aim is ***'to provide good quality housing for those least able to find a solution to their own housing needs'***. Our focus has mainly been centered around families where young children are involved as well as on sheltered housing for older people. However as detailed in our Business Plan, we will strive to ***'Find solutions for those whose housing needs have not been adequately met'***. We also aim to foster partnerships with other agencies as a means of providing accommodation for people with special needs.

The specific aim of the policy is to:

- let our homes in a fair, open and efficient way
- make the best use of our housing stock to meet local need
- contribute to the development of balanced and sustainable communities which could include local lettings policies
- assist the Local Authority in delivering its strategic objectives
- minimise the time properties are empty between each letting
- offer advice and assistance to applicants on their housing options
- Ensure compliance with the Homes & Communities Agency regulatory requirements and specifically the 'Tenancy Standard'

3. Scope of the Policy

The policy applies to anyone seeking accommodation with us which includes current tenants wishing to transfer.

The policy covers the process for registering on choice based lettings schemes on the Wirral and Ellesmere Port and also the allocation of properties

including our approach to housing the homeless, management lets and exchanges.

4. The Registration Process - Wirral

In 2012 the Association became a partner of Property Pool Plus, a sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL) scheme, which is a partnership between five local Councils (Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley, Halton and Wirral) and 22 Housing Associations working in Merseyside. The majority of Housing Associations participating in the CBL scheme do not hold their own waiting lists and neither do we.

In order to be considered for available properties on the Wirral applicants are required to register on the Property Pool Plus data base. They will be required to provide the necessary information and proof of their circumstances in order that their application can be processed and prioritised.

Registration onto the Database is possible by:-

- visiting a local Wirral One Stop Shop
- Registering on line at www.propertypool.org.uk

An applicant's housing need will be assessed according to Property Pool Plus policy (this can be viewed on line at www.propertypool.org.uk or a copy can be requested from any of the participating landlords). The scheme uses a banding system as follows:

BAND	REASON FOR HOUSING NEED
Band A Urgent priority	Health/Welfare (urgent) Statutory homeless (unintentionally with priority need) Regeneration Overcrowded (two or more bedrooms)
Band B High priority	Health / Welfare (high) Overcrowded (one bedroom) Disrepair Under occupation
Band C Medium priority	Health/Welfare (medium) Homeless (no priority need) Homeless (intentional with priority need) Living with family and friends
Band D Low priority	No assessed need and in employment
Band E No priority	No assessed need and not in employment
Band F Reduced priority	Reduced preference status due to unacceptable behaviour; or rent arrears

Applicants who have a history of antisocial behaviour and/or breaches of tenancy may be suspended from the Database or the priority of their application may be limited.

4.1 Allocation of Properties - Wirral

The Wirral database is maintained and monitored by Property Pool Plus – Wirral. The scheme is designed to give greater choice to those looking to move home and puts the onus on the applicant to choose a property rather than the Association offering what it considers suitable. Participating landlords will advertise their vacant properties each week and applicants are invited to express an interest in up to 3 properties each week. The Association has an agreement to advertise 90% of appropriate vacancies each year.

Expressions of interest in properties can be made using one of the following options:

- Telephoning the property pool Wirral team on 0151 691 8518
- Telephoning 03007773022 to place a bid via the automated call system
- Via the website – www.propertypool.org.uk
- Visiting a Wirral One Stop Shop
- Via any of the participating landlords

The Association has direct access to the Property Pool Plus database and is able to extract information from it on applicants who have expressed an interest in any properties they have advertised to let within the Borough of Wirral. The Association will normally offer its properties to those who have the highest priority, can demonstrate affordability and have provided satisfactory references.

4.2 Lettings Criteria

Applicants will not normally be considered if:

- there have outstanding rent arrears from a current or former private or social landlord
- there is a history of antisocial behavior and/or breaches of tenancy serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant
- they caused damage to a private or social landlord property where there is an outstanding rechargeable debt
- they have abandoned a private or social landlord tenancy
- they are a minor (under 18) unless provided with a guarantor
- The property requested is not affordable
- A property has to be sensitively let due to historical management issues.
- Tenancy support is required to sustain the tenancy and that support is not available
- They are unable to pay one week's rent in advance

4.3 Verification Checks

The Association will request current or former landlord references and where this is not appropriate applicants will be asked for either employer or character references.

Verification checks will be carried out by the Association for the purpose of ensuring that:-

- The details provided by the applicant are correct
- The property is suitable for the applicant
- The applicant receives the correct level of priority
- The applicant meets the Lettings Criteria
- There are no outstanding rent arrears and/or rechargeable debts from a current or previous landlord
- There is no history of antisocial behaviour
- The property is affordable

The onus will be on the applicant to provide truthful and honest information required to carry out the Verification Checks. If the applicant withholds consent for any reasonable information being gathered, or deliberately gives false information as part of the application, this may affect them being made an offer of accommodation.

5. Registration Process – Cheshire West & Chester

In 2011 the Association became a partner in the Cheshire West & Chester (CWAC) CBL scheme then known as Trust Home Choice. The scheme name changed in 2015 to West Cheshire Homes. There are a number of scheme partners including Weaver Vale Housing Trust, Chester & District Housing Trust, Plus Dane and Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC). Applicants who register on the West Cheshire Homes database can express an interest in vacancies advertised by all participating landlords. The Association does not hold a waiting list of applicants for its stock in CWAC instead it makes most of its vacancies available to applicants registered with West Cheshire Homes.

Anybody wishing to apply for one of our properties within the CWAC area must first register on the West Cheshire Homes database. They will be required to provide the necessary information and proof of their circumstances for their application to be processed. Their application will be assessed in accordance with its policy and placed in the appropriate band which will reflect their housing need.

Full details of the policy and process can be found at www.westcheshirehomes.co.uk.

In summary registration onto the database is possible by:

- Applying on line to www.westcheshirehomes.co.uk
- Contacting CWAC West Cheshire Homes Team on 03001232442
- For Housing offices at 7-9 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port. CH65 0AX

5.1 Allocation of Properties – Cheshire West & Chester

The CWAC database is maintained and monitored by CWAC West Cheshire Homes Team. As with Wirral the scheme is designed to give greater choice to those looking to move home and puts the onus on the applicant to choose a

property rather than the Association offering what it considers suitable. Participating landlords will advertise their vacant properties each week and applicants are invited to express an interest in as many properties they wish and for which they are eligible. The Association has an agreement to advertise the majority of its vacancies each year.

Expressions of interest in properties can be made using one of the following options:

- Telephoning the CWAC team on 03001232442
- Via the website – www.westcheshirehomes.co.uk

The Association does not currently have direct access to the West Cheshire Homes database and will be provided, in priority order, the details of those applicants who have expressed an interest in the Association's vacancies. The Association will normally offer its properties to those who have the highest priority, can demonstrate affordability and have provided satisfactory references. Although the West Cheshire Homes team takes up references and carry out verification checks at registration applicants wishing to be considered for a property with the Association will be subjected to the same lettings criteria and checks as detailed for Wirral applicants.

6. Alternative Marketing

On occasion, where it has not been possible to let a property via the Choice Based Lettings schemes, it may be necessary to advertise vacancies in other ways such as through lettings agencies or the through the use of Rightmove, Zoopla etc. The lettings criteria and verification checks detailed in 3.1 and 3.2 would still be applied.

7. Homeless Families

Homeless families on the Wirral and Cheshire West and Chester owed a duty under the provisions of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 are registered on Property Pool Plus or West Cheshire Homes and awarded Band A status and would express an interest in properties suitable for their need and household size. Their priority status means that they can usually be accommodated fairly quickly provided appropriate properties are made available. Homeless applicants will be dealt with in the same way as others in respect of verification checks and our lettings criteria. If an applicant is threatened with homelessness within 28 days advice can be sought from the Housing Options team in Wirral by completing an on line form at www.wirral.gov.uk and for Cheshire West and Chester by contacting a Housing Solutions Officer on 03001232442.

8. Management Lets

The majority of our properties are let via the CBL schemes Property Pool Plus and West Cheshire Homes. However in certain exceptional circumstances the Association may wish to house applicants outside of the scheme for other purposes such as:

- Temporary decant of an existing tenant of the Association while repairs or improvements are carried out to their home. They would be offered a suitable vacant property and once the works had been completed they would then be decanted back to their original property.
- Accommodation required following emergencies such as fire, flood, serious harassment or other major incident
- To fulfill any nomination agreements we have with other agencies
- Liaising with social services and other relevant agencies to accommodate applicants with special/support needs into our supported schemes

8.1 Management Transfers

Tenants of the Association wishing to move home would be advised to register with the appropriate CBL scheme where their priority for housing would be assessed and where they will have wider access to housing association vacancies. There may be circumstances where we would wish to give priority to an existing tenant utilising our percentage quota of 10% for management lets. These could include:

- rehousing of victims of a hate crime, physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence and other forms of harassment or to a 'decant' needing to move out for major works or damage resulting from fire, flood etc
- a transfer request on medical grounds which must have written support of a G. P. or Consultant and it must provide clear evidence that the medical condition is exacerbated by the present housing and that a move would clearly benefit the applicant. Medical priority includes both physical and mental illness.
- families living in flats who are above the first floor level and have children below the age of eight will be eligible for consideration after they have been resident for at least 12 months.
- tenants who are experiencing severe social stress problems related to the area in which they are living. There must be supportive, written evidence to substantiate the request for a move. It must be clear that the problem will be resolved by a move.
- tenants where the relationship has broken down and there is clear evidence of this. Consideration will be given to rehousing one of the partners. If the Association are able to help within a reasonable period of time, one suitable offer only will be made.
- tenants who are experiencing financial difficulties and can demonstrate they would benefit by transferring to another more affordable property.
- Other reasonable requests for a move, not covered by the above criteria, will be considered provided there are extenuating circumstances and there is no expense to the Association

Tenants of the association will not normally be considered for a management transfer where:

- they have not held a tenancy for 12 months
- the rent account is in arrears or a recharge for repairs is owed
- there is damage or disrepair to the Association's property for which they are responsible.
- the transfer would result in either overcrowding or substantial under-occupation in the new tenancy.
- a Notice Seeking Possession has been served on the tenant(s) and the possibility of legal action may follow.
- they are the perpetrator of anti social behaviour

8.2 Lettings to Staff and Board members

In the event that a member of staff, board member or someone with who they are closely associated applies for housing accommodation with the Association there should be a full disclosure of that person's interest within the decision making process. Provided that the applicant is able to demonstrate that they meet the appropriate selection criteria they may be considered for housing but any decision to make an offer of housing should be ratified by board itself. The same is true of any such relevant person, already a tenant of the Association who is in the position of requesting a transfer.

9. Exchanges

Secure and Assured tenants of the Association have the right to exchange their tenancies with tenants of this and other Associations, New Town or Local Authorities, subject to both landlords' agreement in writing. Tenants exchanging must accept the property as seen and the Association will not be held responsible for any internal decorations. The Association will be responsible for ensuring that there is a valid gas safety certificate.

Consent will not unreasonably be withheld and will be granted except where:-

- There is a court order outstanding or a Notice of Seeking Possession upon them
- There are outstanding rent arrears or an obligation of the tenancy has been broken or not performed
- The home is too large or too small for the person they are exchanging with
- The home has been adapted or designed to suit a physically disabled person and the person with whom they are exchanging is not disabled
- Tenants will not be allowed to exchange with somebody who has on Introductory Tenancy
- Assured Shorthold tenants do not have the right to exchange

Tenants are advised to seek their own mutual exchange by registering with appropriate Home Swap schemes if residing in Cheshire West and Chester; for tenants living on the Wirral tenants can register their wish to Exchange via Property Pool Plus if they want to exchange within Merseyside or appropriate Home Swap schemes for other areas. The Association will provide further

advice on this on request. Both landlords must agree in writing before any exchange is carried out.

10. Equal Opportunities

The Association is committed to promoting equality of opportunity within the housing allocation process and aims to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnerships, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex and Sexual orientation. We will be accessible, responsive and sensitive to the diverse needs of all individuals.

11. Appeals Procedures

Appeal against a Selection Process or Management Transfer Decision

If a tenant or person is dissatisfied with the way this part of the policy has been implemented or disagrees with the way in which we have reached a decision then they can lodge a complaint using our Complaints/Compliments and Concern Policy. Further information is available via our website www.wmhaltd.org.uk or by contacting us on 0151 647 5471.

Appeal against a Choice Based Lettings Registration Decision

Any applicant who is unhappy in the way their application has been dealt with may appeal against the decision to either **Property Pool Plus** for Wirral applicants or **West Cheshire Homes** for Cheshire West and Cheshire applicants using their Appeals Procedure.

12. Monitoring

The Association's performance on lettings is monitored by means of a system called CORE (Continuous recordings of new lettings).

Both the Property Pool Plus and West Cheshire Homes teams monitor each of the Partners of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme to ensure adherence to the Allocation Policy and any nomination agreement.

Statistics on all lettings are presented to Tenant's subcommittee and Board on a bi monthly basis.

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