

# Allocations (New Applicants) Policy



<b>Reference:</b>	HS_POL_HOU_ALN_1.0	<b>Author:</b>	Emily Orme
<b>Scope:</b>	Housing Solutions	<b>Approved by:</b>	Board
<b>Legislation:</b>	Housing Acts 1985 Housing Act 1988 Housing Act 1996 Localism Act 2011 Welfare Reform Act 2012 Children Act 1989 Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 Data Protection Act 2018 UK General Data Protection Regulations	<b>Date of approval:</b>	28 <sup>th</sup> July 2021
<b>Regulatory/ Governance:</b>	Nominations Agreements Regulator of Social Housing including Tenancy standard	<b>Date of next review:</b>	June 2024
<b>Related Policies:</b>	Mutual Exchange Policy Tenancy Policy Shared Ownership Management Policy Shared Ownership Sales, Re-sales & Allocations Policy Succession policy Assignment Policy Mutual Exchange Policy Safeguarding Policy Anti-social Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy Domestic Abuse Policy Decant Policy Complaints Policy Probity Policy		

## 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to issue guidance in relation to the allocation of Housing Solutions rented housing stock.
- 1.2 This policy has been developed in partnership with key local authorities (outlined in section 5.2) and ensures Housing Solutions homes are allocated to new and existing tenants (those who are transferring to another property) in ways that:

- best meet the housing needs of our tenants;
- promote tenant mobility; and
- ensure the use of our scarce resources are maximised and that properties are allocated in a transparently equitable way.

1.3 It is important to note, however, that Housing Solutions operates in areas of extremely high demand where housing supply is limited.

## 2. Scope

2.1 This policy covers allocations for the following Housing Solutions rented housing:

- Social rented and affordable housing;
- key worker;
- specialist housing stock (sheltered, extra care and supported housing);
- homes with specific local lettings stipulations.

2.2 Housing Solutions aims to provide good quality housing which will be let to those applicants most in need in line with statutory and legal requirements. The association will ensure that vacant dwellings are let to new tenants as quickly as possible in a timely manner and to minimise rent loss.

2.3 For new tenants on the waiting list nominated by a local authority Housing Solutions aims to:

- empower applicants to exercise choice in both where they live and the type of property in which they want to live in line with their housing need;
- create a transparent and accountable lettings service that is easily understood by applicants;
- help create and maintain sustainable and balanced communities;
- let homes quickly and efficiently, reducing void turnaround time.

2.4 If a tenant is seeking to purchase a home through the shared ownership scheme they will be signposted to the Shared Ownership Sales, Re-sales & Allocations Policy.

2.5 Private owners, leaseholders and shared owners are exempt from this policy.

2.6 To support the operation of this policy, Housing Solutions will:

- ensure staff are fully trained in accordance with this policy;
- ensure that the policy is transparent and accessible to all of our tenants;
- allocate homes in accordance with this policy;
- support applicants in applying for a transfer by giving assistance with making their application or signposting to other agencies as required.

## 3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The roles and responsibilities relevant to this policy are:

<b>Board</b>	Responsible for approving this policy and any amendments to it from time to time. Responsible for setting the strategic direction for allocations.
<b>Executive Team</b>	Responsible for overseeing compliance with this policy. Responsible for granting approval for a member of staff who indicates they want to apply for Housing Need (para 8.8)
<b>Head of Housing</b>	Responsible for overseeing the operational delivery and service quality of allocations and transfer services. Responsible for deciding to exercise discretion in exceptional circumstances to allow a letting to a tenant who does not meet the

	financial assessment threshold (para 7.8).
<b>Lettings Manager</b>	Responsible for the day to day management of the Lettings Team delivering operational lettings services and liaising with local authority partners to proactively manage the nominations process. Responsible for reviewing decisions not to proceed with an offer to an applicant (para 7.5)
<b>Lettings and Allocations Officers</b>	Responsible for the day to day frontline lettings service.
<b>Surveying Team</b>	Responsible for providing advice and information to the Lettings Team on whether a property can be sufficiently adapted for an applicant's needs following an Occupational Therapist report.

## 4. Definitions

4.1 For those accessing this policy the following definitions apply:

- **Nomination:** By agreement, to place those in housing need into a home as they become available.
- **Allocation:** The process of matching a property to an applicant nominated by a local authority (as identified in section 5.2 of this policy).
- **Transfer:** A request from an existing tenant who wishes to move from their current Housing Solutions property to another Housing Solutions property.
- **Applicants:** Potential tenants who are nominated to Housing Solutions for accommodation.
- **Thames Home Choice :** choice based lettings website for transfer applicants in partnership with the Radian Group and RBWM.

## 5. Legislation

5.1 This document makes reference to the legal requirements and policies that must be adhered to. The policy has also been developed in line with the Regulatory of Social Housing regulatory standards and Housing Solutions' other policies.

## 6. Allocation

6.1 To be eligible for a nomination to a Housing Solutions property an applicant must be register with the local authority where the housing stock in which they wish to live is located. The local authority will advise if an applicant is eligible or does not qualify to join their housing register.

6.2 The local authority will assess the individual's application on the basis of housing need according to their local allocations' policy and then advise the individual of the likelihood of being able to rehouse them.

6.3 As at May 2020, Housing Solutions has nomination agreements for housing within the following local housing authority areas:

- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM)
- Slough Borough Council
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Basingstoke & Deane (limited stock)
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Reading
- Bracknell Forest

- 6.4 On receipt of a void property, where required by the specific nominations agreement Housing Solutions will notify the housing options department at the relevant local authority who will make a nomination from their housing register.
- 6.5 All applicants are required to undergo a financial assessment as part of the verification process at Housing Solutions.
- 6.6 Housing Solutions has the right to reject a nomination based on (but not limited to) the following criteria:
- There is insufficient evidence to support an application. (Examples may include, but are not limited to, insufficient information on previous addresses, household members or income);
  - The applicant has a legal or other interest in another property (whether residential or commercial);
  - The applicants' needs do not meet the property type available (for example, the applicant requires particular adaptations to make the property practical which are not already made to the property in question);
  - The applicant(s) holds a current housing association or local authority tenancy.
  - The applicant or someone in the applicant's household has previously been evicted by Housing Solutions, or any other private or social landlord, for rent arrears and/or anti-social behaviour and/or tenancy related fraud.
  - The applicant or someone in the applicant's household is in arrears and/or is being investigated for anti-social behaviour or tenancy fraud with their current landlord.
  - The applicant or someone in the applicant's household has former tenant arrears with Housing Solutions.
  - On the completion of a financial assessment the applicant is financially unable to sustain the tenancy (see sections 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 of this policy).

## **7. Offers of Accommodation**

- 7.1 Once a nomination has been accepted by Housing Solutions a provisional offer of accommodation will be sent to the applicant.
- 7.2 All offers of accommodation are provisional and subject to the satisfactory verification of the applicant's eligibility, housing need and identity. Checks will also be conducted to ensure that the applicant's housing need matches the property offered. A housing assessment will be undertaken for any applicant for sheltered housing.
- 7.3 Offers will also be subject to establishing that the applicant is able to prove their ability to sustain payments of the tenancy rent and other charges.
- 7.4 Housing Solutions retains the right to withdraw an offer in instances where:
- there is insufficient evidence to support an application;
  - a previous history of tenancy breaches have been identified; or
  - an offered tenancy is likely not to be sustainable or affordable.
  - The applicant's circumstance and/or medical condition/needs render them unsuitable for property they have been nominated for.
- 7.5 Decisions made about not proceeding with an offer will be reviewed by the Lettings Manager.
- 7.6 To counter potential fraud, Housing Solutions requires that all applicants provide photographic ID at the time of signing up for the tenancy. Details of the photographic ID and other information that is required at sign-up will be provided

to the applicant prior to the sign-up appointment.

- 7.7 All applicants are required to undergo a financial assessment. Where an applicant either already has financial problems, or cannot demonstrate a sufficient ability to pay, Housing Solutions may offer support through our Welfare & Support team or signpost the individual to external money advice services.
- 7.8 In exceptional circumstances, Housing Solutions may decide to offer a tenancy where there is not a clear demonstrable means of an applicant covering their necessary outgoings, an example of this may include a young person leaving care where the local authority has a duty to accommodate. This decision will be made by the Head of Housing in partnership with the referring local authority.
- 7.9 Where an offer is made to an applicant (as outlined in 6.8), this offer may be dependent on the applicant attending a financial workshop covering budgeting skills.
- 7.10 Housing Solutions expects all new tenants to make a rental payment of one week in advance of monies due.

## **8. The Appeals Process relating to Allocations**

- 8.1 If a tenant feels dissatisfied with a decision made concerning their nomination or transfer application they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with the Lettings & Allocations Officer. This includes when the applicant has been rejected following the financial assessment.
- 8.2 If the tenant remains dissatisfied following the discussion with the Lettings & Allocations Officer they can request a review of the decision.
- 8.3 Whilst this review/appeal is being considered the tenant must be made aware that the property that was originally available will not be held pending the outcome.
- 8.4 The tenant's review request should be made in writing within 21 days of the original decision being communicated to the tenant. The review request should include reasons why the tenant is appealing against the decision and information they wish to be considered
- 8.5 An independent senior officer who was not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal and decide whether to overturn or support the original decision.
- 8.6 The tenant will be advised of the final decision in writing within 21 days of receipt of the review request.
- 8.7 If the tenant is still not satisfied with the decision that has been made, they have the right to make a formal complaint (See Housing Solutions Complaints Policy).
- 8.8 Housing Solutions staff applying for housing will need to make it known to a senior member of staff that they intend to do so. Approval will be required from a member of the Executive Team. (See Housing Solutions Probity Policy for further guidance).

## **9. Equality & Diversity**

- 9.1 Housing Solutions recognises the needs of a diverse population and always acts within the scope of its own Equality and Diversity Policy, the Human Rights Act 1998, and Equalities Act 2010.
- 9.2 Housing Solutions works closely with its partners to ensure it has a clear understanding of its resident community with clear regularly updated service user

profiles. The organisation will record, analyse and monitor information on ethnicity, vulnerability and disability.

## **10. Confidentiality**

10.1 Under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR) all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential. This includes:

- Anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a resident, client, applicant, staff or board member
- Sensitive organisational information

10.2 Housing Solutions employees will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information where there is a legal basis for processing the information.

## **11. Review**

11.1 This policy will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis or more frequently in response to changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, good practice or changes in other relevant Housing Solutions' policy

11.2 Our performance in relation to the delivery of the services and activities set out in this policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis through our established reporting mechanisms to our Senior Management Team, Executive Team, Board and associated committees.

*Footnote: Age 55 for sheltered schemes is still used as criteria for Sheltered Schemes because of planning consents relating to the scheme build. Generally most tenants who move into sheltered schemes are in their seventies and it is rare for anyone under 60 to do so.*