



Lettings Policy

Selection of Applicants, Allocation of Properties, Transfer of Existing Tenants & Access to Waiting List

Version #:	Date:	Summary of Changes
Version 11	Sept 2020	References to Neighbourly Places Strategy and community contribution removed
Version 10	Sept 2020	Full policy review – approved by Board
Version 9	Feb 2020	Addition and amendments to rehousing employees and relatives section
Version 8	Jan 2018	Amendment to job titles, minor change to transfer and letting strategy sections.
Version 7	February 2017	Amendments to reflect transfer rules.
Version 6	February 2015	Changes made to ensure the policy is compliant with legislative and regulatory requirements. The job titles have also been updated where applicable.
Version 5	January 2013	Amendments in light of reform of welfare benefits. Reference to differing practice in different local authority areas.
Version 4	May 2010	Removal of housing for older people, changes to applicants aged under 18 and removal of reference to Huddersfield
Version 3	March 2009	Changes to Housing For Older People
Version 2	October 2007	
Version 1	February 2006	

Lettings Policy

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1 Policy Statement

This policy establishes the approach that Connect Housing will take towards the allocation of our general needs and housing for older people homes. The Association's approach to allocations ensures lettings are sustainable and that they continue to meet Connect's strategic objectives and overarching vision and purpose. As such this policy provides general guidance and transparency for the processes involved.

We work closely with our local authority partners to support them in their duties and we network regularly with other housing organisations to share good practice.

2 Tenancy Allocation

The allocation of void properties will be undertaken in three ways:

- I. Through local authority Choice Based Lettings (CBL) systems or nominations¹;
- II. Direct Advertising;
- III. Direct Lettings.

Choice Based Lettings

The Association recognises it has a duty to assist the local authorities we work with to discharge their housing functions, particularly to the homeless. Where we own stock there are nomination agreements in place with the relevant local authority and a proportion of lettings we make are nominated by that local authority using their CBL systems. Applicants will be approached and assessed for void properties in the priority order as determined by the priority or 'banding' applied by the relevant CBL authority.

Direct Advertising²

After fulfilling our nomination obligations we will allocate a percentage of our remaining voids using direct marketing through a variety of media. Applications for properties advertised using these methods will be assessed proportionately on housing need.

Direct Lettings³

Under certain circumstances we may not advertise a property, the reasons for this include but are not limited to:

- Management Lettings⁴; an authorised letting by management where the applicant may be fleeing from a violent situation such as serious anti social behaviour (ASB),

¹ Nominations – a letting made from a Local Authority Register to an applicant who is in 'housing need'.

² Direct Advertising – where void properties are advertised for rent but not through a CBL scheme.

³ Direct Letting – when a property is allocated directly to an applicant without advertising.

domestic abuse, placed under witness protection or any similar situation which places them under extreme risk. We may also need to directly let to existing tenants whose current home is subject to major repairs or disposal – we call these lettings decanting.

- Internal Transfers; under certain circumstances, and subject to approval from the Lettings and Leasehold Service Manager or more senior manager, we may transfer existing Connect Housing tenants to a property if their current home does not meet their current housing need.

3 Mutual Exchange⁵

We will provide all of our tenants with free access to an internet based mutual exchange systems, currently <https://www.houseexchange.org.uk>. Our Mutual Exchange Policy is available at www.connecthousing.org.uk.

4 How we Measure Housing Need

The Association uses an allocation system which measures relative need. Priority will be awarded for the following criteria:

- Property size and suitability;
- Affordability;
- Health and mobility considerations;
- Other housing requirements e.g. fleeing violence.

Priority will be awarded to each individual application based on the circumstances outlined on the application form together with any supporting documentation and all information will be checked. We will interview applicants, prior to making offers of rehousing, to ensure that the information on which our decisions are based is accurate and current. We will seek to verify all relevant details provided by an applicant and this will include previous tenancy checks, proof of identity, right to rent, access to benefits and any other checks necessary. We seek to take up references from previous landlords and other bodies prior to offering a tenancy but recognise that not all applicants can provide references so we will not always make offers dependant upon a suitable reference, although it remains our preferred option.

⁴ Management Letting – similar to Direct Letting when a property is allocated directly to an applicant without advertising.

⁵ Mutual Exchange; a way for two or more social housing residents to move property and location by swapping homes with another social housing resident.

Allocation decisions will normally be based on the level of priority for each shortlisted applicant. However, in the interests of meeting the needs of applicants and in creating and maintaining sustainable communities, allocations may be made out of priority order. These decisions will be recorded in the shortlisting documentation with the reasons provided. In cases of identical housing need we may take into account the length of time we have been in receipt of an application.

5 Asset Management

The organisation will periodically examine whether it is getting the best use of the current stock and will implement actions if we are not. For example we may change the age profile in a local lettings policy in order to stimulate demand.

6 Communication

During all stages of the application process customers will be contacted by both email and telephone where those contact details are available. In all cases where we have contacted potential applicants we will expect a response by 10 am the next available working day. A secondary phone call and/or email will be made before the 10 am deadline to eliminate any potential errors made when dialling or inputting email addresses. Where we do not receive any communication within this timescale we will assume the applicant does not wish to proceed with their application. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that their contact details are kept up to date.

7 The Association's Lettings Approach

In order to achieve sustainable communities, we will:

- Use local lettings initiatives – see below;
- Offer properties to lower priority applicants where it is deemed appropriate;
- Advertise the availability of properties including the use of commercial property websites;
- Selectively use choice-based lettings schemes where these exist;
- Consider, and where appropriate prioritise direct lettings or internal transfer requests⁶ at the Association's discretion;
- Adopt marketing strategies to attract applicants who are under-represented within the communities in which we work;
- Take into consideration the affordability of each allocation for the applicant;

⁶ Transfers – where an existing Connect tenant moves to another Connect housing property.

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- Allocate in line with any current strategies to alleviate homelessness and actively engage in the National Housing Federation's Commitment to Refer and work with Local Authorities to alleviate homelessness;
 - When required we will use our void properties in an agile way, for example to react to localised or national emergencies.

8 Local lettings Policies⁷

For some dwellings we may place certain criteria for eligible applicants. This may relate to either an internal policy or a funding requirement stipulated in the Section 106 Agreement. Examples of these may be:

- Seeking a higher percentage of working families on lower incomes and to encourage sustainability within communities;
- Allocations to applicants with direct links to the relevant local area;
- Ensure an understanding and commitment to use the energy efficient features installed in specific properties before allocation;
- Balance density through restricting the number of lets to households with large number of occupants;
- Specify age, disability or support needs for properties designed to meet specific needs or age groups.

An objective criteria will be used and we will ensure we are compliant with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in making these decisions.

9 Grounds for Refusing an Application

We will obtain information about applicants from other agencies. If an applicant fails to disclose information that has been requested on the application form or provides us with information which we later find to be deliberately false or misleading we will cease the process and cancel the application.

To enable us to create sustainable and viable communities we may refuse to rehouse an applicant if we believe that their previous conduct has not been in line with our values and ethics or their financial status does not meet our criteria. This may include but is not limited to;

- Applicants or any named householder who have been responsible for anti-social behaviour or known to have caused nuisance or harassed neighbours;
- Where we have evidence of deliberate or wilful damage to previous properties;

⁷ Local Lettings Policy – used to enhance the sustainability of defined communities by giving preference for offers of accommodation to particular customer groups.

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- Previous rent arrears where the amount is more than two weeks' rent and where a suitable re-payment plan has not been adhered to for a minimum of three months;
 - Criminal convictions will be assessed against the property being applied for, as a result the applicant may be refused particular properties where we do not feel the tenancy would be sustainable;
 - Applicants who do not meet the Right to Rent criteria⁸;
 - Applicants who have support needs that would render their tenancy unsustainable and for whom the Association and other statutory and voluntary agencies are unable to provide an appropriate level of support to address those needs;
 - Those applicants who do not have sufficient income or recourse to public funds to pay the rent and sustain a tenancy;
 - Those whose capital and savings which would enable them to purchase a suitable property on the open market as defined by local market values at that time;
 - Those under the age of 16 years;
 - Where it would not be in the interests of Connect, acting reasonably, to provide consent to a tenancy commencing.

A full Suspension Procedure for guidance is available at www.connecthousing.org.uk.

10 Rehousing of Staff, Contractors, Board Members and Relatives

When considering applications for rehousing from staff, contractors, Board Members and relatives, Connect Housing will comply with its Probity Policy⁹.

The provision of housing in these circumstances specifies that:

- The employee has no involvement in or influence over the process by which we allocate the tenancy in question;
- The applicant fully meets the criteria for allocating housing.

The employee or relative requesting housing must complete an electronic Declaration of Interests pro-forma which is passed to the Business Assurance Team. A Director will review the request and if it is acceptable it is then passed to the Chief Executive Officer for formal approval.

⁸ Right to Rent is the name given to a UK Government policy contained in the Immigration Act 2016 whereby landlords in England have to check the immigration status of tenants they rent properties to, and deny lodgings to those who cannot prove they are permitted to live in a rented home.

⁹ Probity – a system to ensure aspects of our business are legally and morally accountable.

Once approved the Association will treat the application exactly the same as those of all other applicants. In addition to the tenancy commencement forms being signed and checked by the Leasehold and Lettings Service Manager, any forms must also be countersigned by the Senior Manager Neighbourhoods or a member of the Management Group before processing.

It is expected that applicants will have declared any interests and have the suitable approval prior to making any applications for a property. In the event this has not been completed, Connect reserves the right to bypass such applications, where the property in question is available and ready to let.

On re-housing, any conflicts on the patch by way of a relationship with the Community Housing Officer or other staff designated to operate in the vicinity of the tenancy, will also be considered and further declarations made or changes to the patch as appropriate.

11 Applicants Under 18 Years Old

No-one under 16 years old can legally be offered a tenancy. Applicants between 16 and 18 should be regarded as vulnerable and their support needs should be taken into account in the interests of creating a sustainable tenancy.

Any young person aged 16 or 17 will only be offered an equitable tenancy¹⁰ in circumstances where they have an agency working with them such as Social Services or another support provider. The agency or close associate must be willing and able to act as a trustee and guarantor acting always in the best interests of the young person until they reach the age of 18 and are able to hold the legal estate of the property in their own name.

12 Appeals

Any customer wishing to appeal against a decision made with regard to their application should do so in writing to the Senior Manager Neighbourhoods within 21 days of receiving the decision that gives rise to their appeal.

In their appeal they should state specifically why they feel their application has not been dealt with fairly or correctly. The appeals process is not a means to express disappointment with an unsuccessful application for a home.

¹⁰ Equitable Tenancy – a tenancy agreement offered to a minor under the age of 18. Anyone on such a tenancy must also have a person who can act as 'Trustee' for their tenancy

An applicant wishing to complaint about the customer service they have received from the leasehold and Lettings Team should use the Association’s Complaints Policy.

13 Service Standards

We aspire to provide all of our customers with the highest levels of customer service and strive to allocate our properties sensitively and efficiently. All of our customers should expect us to;

- Respond to communication with 10 working days of receipt;
- Provide our customers with clear and concise details about the services we offer;
- Provide and promote access to a mutual exchange scheme to our tenants;
- Work with internal and external services to provide additional support for our customers;
- Wherever possible we will support mobility and provide options via mutual exchange transfer and direct lettings;
- If an application has been refused we will provide clear reasons for doing so.

14 Corporate Responsibilities

This policy adheres to and operates in accordance with all cross cutting polices and strategies, the main ones worthy of note are: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Data Protection, Confidentiality, Customer Care, Safeguarding and Economic Inclusion.

15 Document Review

Connect Housing will undertake to review this document every three years or amend before where there are any significant changes in legislation, regulation or Local Authority policy. Approval from the Board will be sought for any significant changes to this policy.