



Halton
Housing

Policy

Title:

Assisted Furniture Scheme Policy

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Service Area applies to:

Allocations

Approved by:

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Halton Housing appreciates that for a certain number of applicants who may be vulnerable because of their economic or personal circumstances, the offer of an unfurnished tenancy under Halton Housing allocations policy may not in itself be enough to meet all their housing needs. An obstacle often arises because they lack the means to access basic furniture and other household items, and this may impact on their ability to sustain their tenancy in the longer term.
- 1.2 This policy sets out the principles upon which Halton Housing would look to assist those customers who qualify under the scheme, and identify white goods and/or other furniture items that would help them setting up and sustain their new accommodation.

Aims / Objectives

- 1.3 Halton Housing will always look at ways in which it can positively contribute to the sustainability of the communities it works within. The provision of white goods and/or other items of furniture to vulnerable customers which can assist them in setting up and establishing their new tenancy is seen as contributing to this general aim.
- 1.4 One of the main objectives in running this scheme is to give qualifying customers practical support and encourage the best possible start to establishing their tenancy with Halton Housing.

Scope

- 1.5 This policy will primarily apply to employees working in the Allocations Team for its implementation but will also include liaison with employees in the Welfare Benefit Money Advice and the Tenancy Support teams.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1 Potential applicants for the scheme will be identified by the Allocations Advisors at their tenancy sustainability assessments, during the pre-tenancy stage.
- 2.2 The Allocations Advisor will be looking for indicators in relation to an applicant's vulnerability that could be helped by the scheme. For example, this could be because of their low income, and/or the personal circumstances that gave rise to them applying to our organization for their housing needs. Such

markers would point to possible issues/problems that the applicant may face in setting up their tenancy properly.

Eligibility

2.3 Halton Housing will look to assist with the provision of white goods items to certain customers on the following basis:

- The scheme will only be open to applicants off Halton Housing's waiting list, who meet certain criteria
- Applicants looking to downsize but the ability to purchase these goods is a barrier to moving
- Applications seeking assistance under this scheme will be assessed on the premise that there is a significant risk that the applicant will potentially not be able to sustain the tenancy in the longer-term without such assistance being provided at the start of their tenancy
- The applicant does not qualify under any other scheme that could provide them with furniture etc. to begin their tenancy with Halton Housing – for example, loans and grants available from the DWP

Review of Circumstances

2.4 There is sometimes a delay between the customer's initial tenancy sustainability assessment and moving into their new property. If necessary, Halton Housing reserves the right to review the customer's circumstances at their first post tenancy visit to ensure that they are still eligible for assistance under the scheme.

2.5 Conversely, some customers who may have been told initially that they do not qualify for assistance under the scheme, may have had a change in circumstances that now makes them eligible. Halton Housing may also review such cases where this is felt to be appropriate.

Provision

2.6 Any white goods items provided will be gifted by Halton Housing to the qualifying applicant at the start of their tenancy i.e. it will be given to them on a one-off basis. There will be no obligation for us to repair or replace any of the items that have been provided in the future. The need to register the appliances with the manufacturer for the period of warranty will be the responsibility of the customer receiving the items.

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- 2.7 Any white goods and/or furniture item is ordered via an approved distributor, for delivery directly to the customer's address, working in partnership with Halton Housing to facilitate the scheme.
 - 2.8 Halton Housing reserves the right to specify that certain essential items are to be provided as part of each individual award.

Funding

- 2.9 An overall annual budget figure for the year will be determined and monitored by an appropriate officer of Halton Housing. The provision of the scheme will be primarily demand-led by qualifying applicants and will be subject to annual budget limitations and could be withdrawn at any time without notice.
- 2.10 In order as many potential customers can benefit under the scheme as possible, each application will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and the awards will be determined by the known circumstances of the applicant at that time, and may have to be restricted in terms of quantity or necessity.

Responsibility

- 2.11 The Director of Customer Experience will ultimately be responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.
- 2.12 Responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of the policy will lie with the Neighbourhood Allocations Manager.

Service Standards

- 2.13 The main service standard that applies to this policy is on behalf of the customer; in that once we have approved the application it is anticipated that the items will be provided by the chosen supplier/distributor within 28 days. However, this is dependent on them being able to fulfil their obligations with the supply and installation of any goods, to which Halton Housing has no control.

Performance Measures / Monitoring

- 2.14 It is not envisaged that any specific performance measure will be required regarding this scheme, as it is demand-led by qualifying applicants. However, details of the number of applicants benefitting under the scheme will be kept on our "Housing Management I.T. System" for the usual financial and governance requirements, as well as for developmental purposes.

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- 2.15 The Head of Neighbourhoods will be responsible for monitoring the overall budget that funds the scheme.

Consultation Arrangements

- 2.16 This policy has been considered by the Customer Forum and their views have been incorporated into the policy.

Benchmark Analysis

- 2.17 Account has been taken of the National Housing Federation publication “Win-win: How partnership working delivers the goods for residents, housing associations and furniture re-use organisations” in developing this policy.

3. Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance

- 3.1 Under the Allocations section of the RSH’s Tenancy Standard there is a specific expectation (2.2) which states that: *“Registered providers shall minimize the time that properties are empty between each letting. When doing this, they shall consider the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties”*.
- 3.2 In addition, under the Tenure section of this Standard there is a specific expectation (3.1) which states that: *“Registered providers shall publish clear and accessible policies which outline their approach to tenancy management. They shall develop and provide services that will support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The approach should set out how registered providers will make sure that the home continues to be occupied by the tenant they let the home to”*.
- 3.3 There is no legislation that currently affects this policy.

4. Diversity Considerations

- 4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on this policy in April 2023. The assessment concluded that the policy was not directly or indirectly discriminatory, and that it did increase equality of opportunity for those benefiting under the scheme.

5. Links to Strategies, Policies and Associated Documents

- Affordability Policy
- Void Optimisation Policy

6. Business Impact

- 6.1 There are cost implications for Halton Housing regarding the way in which any white goods and/or furniture items are gifted to qualifying applicants. However, it is envisaged that this can be offset by tenancies being sustained to a greater extent in the longer-term, with subsequent savings being accrued through lower turnover volumes, together with the associated lower re-let costs and rent loss.

- 6.2 From the customer's point of view, the effective implementation of this policy to those who qualify under the scheme will undoubtedly provide them with a better service and add to their overall experience when being given accommodation by Halton Housing.



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