

Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy outlines our approach to ensure the allocations of its housing stock is fair, transparent, and appropriately recorded. It also applies to homes which are let to applicants via nomination to the local authority.
- 1.2 The aims and objective of this policy is to detail the ways in which our homes are let, who we house, the eligibility criteria, our matching standards, and other relevant information to any properties which are also let outside of nominations to the local authority.
- 1.3 The policy also aims to ensure that we meet our statutory and regulatory responsibilities and contractual obligations with Halton Borough Council (HBC), which is to provide 50% of stock for allocation via the online Choice Based Lettings service 'Property Pool Plus'.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1 Our policy is to ensure our properties are allocated fairly, responsibly, with transparency and to those who are in greatest need. How our properties are let:
 - Via a nomination agreement with Halton Borough Council
 - To customer via a direct match
 - Via a local lettings criteria document for new affordable housing development schemes
 - Directly allocated via the High Priority Panel to customer who have an urgent requirement to be rehoused.
 - To support the Housing First allocations
 - To support Care leavers
 - To support Next Steps Accommodation (for rough sleepers)
 - As a 'sensitive let' to address any history of local tenancy management issues
- 2.2 We are committed to working with Halton Borough Council and local authorities where our properties are located to assist them with their statutory duties in relation to the homeless and those in priority need. Nomination agreements will vary between local authorities, including where we must meet lettings quotas for our empty properties.
- 2.3 Our intention is to maintain an internal Transfer (High Priority) List to help rehouse existing customers in urgent need of priority rehousing. We are also committed to working with a small number of specialist partner agencies – such as Housing First initiative, Care Leavers and Next Steps accommodation

initiative who make referrals to us outside of the locally agreed allocations Policy and Property Pool Plus.

Eligibility

- 2.4 Our lettings are subject to verification of applicants' circumstances, identity needs, and affordability assessments to ensure that all tenancies are sustainable. We aim to support all our customers to sustain their new tenancy through a range of support and financial inclusion services.
- 2.5 We reserve the right to carry out our own checks, conduct risk assessments and decline nominees or seek further information or assurances before offering a tenancy to any applicant who we believe to be unsuitable or who poses an unreasonable risk i.e. Financial, or due to a criminal conviction. We also reserve the right to decline an applicant where the local authority is unable to provide timely, thorough, and accurate background information about vulnerability, previous tenancy conduct, or safeguarding concerns.
- 2.6 The aim of this policy is to enable Halton Housing to allocate up to 50% of our homes, using a specific set of criteria which includes but is not limited to :-
- Customers who have been medically assessed as requiring adapted properties as priority
 - Customers who are currently occupying a fully adapted property that does not meet their current requirements, and a transfer into a more suitable property would free-up an adapted property for a customer listed on our accessible homes register
 - Customers who are under occupying and by them transferring to another property would free up a property for a larger family who have been identified as overcrowding
 - Customers who, following the outcome of a High Priority Panel, have a need to move on grounds such as (but not restricted to) Severe Domestic Violence, Harassment, Welfare, Court order or a supporting letter from a Police Officer ranked 'Inspector' or above.
 - Where major repairs to existing homes have resulted in a temporary decant to another available property. Halton Housing would reserve the right to permanently transfer a customer to a decanted property should it be deemed appropriate for both the customer and Halton Housing
 - Where a customer has been left in occupation as a result of a failed succession application but has a housing need therefore requiring a much quicker resolve such as a direct allocation.
 - Where we have provided nominations on a new development scheme to a local authority, but a local letting has been applied by Halton Housing stating a % of customers are in employment on a first let. If this is not met by the

local authority, we will look at our own transfer list to assess the suitability of our applicants.

- The application of age limits to certain types of accommodation and areas with a view to protecting our customers wellbeing and safety. E.g. Family size flats without lifts where access is restricted or would increase the probability of a slip, trip or fall.
- Due to the availability and popularity of family housing in areas of high demand, we reserve the right to decline an offer of 'house' type of accommodation to single parents with access to children only. This is due to the limited availability and demand of family accommodation. However, we would make available family size flat type accommodation pending the outcome of an affordability assessment. This is to ensure long term sustainability, and best use of our housing stock.

2.7 We will consider the following applicants to be ineligible for a property:

- Applicants who provide false or misleading information in relation to their application
- Applicants who do not provide evidence to confirm they have UK citizenship; indefinite or limited leave to remain in the UK; or have applied for an extension of their leave to remain if it has expired
- Applicants without the Right to Rent as defined under the provisions of the Immigration Act 2014. Any person with a time-limited Right to Rent may be offered housing but will be subject to a follow up check when this expires
- Applicants under the age of 18 ('minors') unless a tenancy is being held in trust by a guarantor or are being corporate parented by the Local Authority.
- Applicants we have served with a Notice due to a breach of tenancy, unless we no longer consider the Notice to be valid – a Notice served for rent arrears will not be considered valid where the customer has repaid their arrears
- Applicants who we have obtained a Possession Order against, unless the order is for rent arrears and they have repaid their arrears, or the order is for another breach of tenancy, but we are no longer pursuing legal action
- Applicants who have an outstanding debt with us that is still within the statute barred period of 6 years and recoverable (excluding a debt which is the result of Housing Benefit payments being made in arrears)
- Any applicant who is subject to legal action by another landlord on the grounds of a serious breach of tenancy, such as anti-social behaviour or action under the Environmental Protection Act – this includes service of a formal Notice including but not limited to a Notice of Seeking Possession or Notice to Quit
- Applicants who owe rent arrears to another landlord, unless they are taking reasonable steps to repay the debt

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- Applicants who have been convicted of violent or sexual offences where we are not provided with full access to their Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement assessment and other relevant data
 - Applicants who do not provide evidence to confirm they have the means to pay the rent (including eligible service charges) at the point of letting – this requirement may be waived where an appropriate third party or agency has agreed to guarantee or underwrite the rent liability
 - Applicants with support needs which we are unable to meet internally or through an external service.
- 2.8 Any external applicant who has perpetrated anti-social behaviour within the last two years or who has an unspent conviction for serious crime against a person will be assessed on their individual merit and an offer may be made dependant on the behaviour since the conviction and involvement with other agencies.
- 2.9 Halton Housing will always make best use of its housing stock by ensuring its properties are fully occupied and affordable to enable long-term sustainability, as stipulated in part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. When allocating a property, the following government guidelines regarding a bedroom need eligibility will apply:
- 2.10 The following cohorts of people will be allocated their own bedroom:
- A married or cohabiting couple,
 - Adult aged 21 years or more,
 - Pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same gender,
 - Pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of gender,
 - An adolescent aged 10-20 years paired with a child aged under 10 years of the same gender,
 - An unpaired adolescent aged 10-20 years,
 - An unpaired child aged under 10 years.
 - A couple of children who cannot share because of a disability or medical condition.
 - A carer who does not primarily reside in your household, but provides regular overnight care for a tenant, tenant's partner, tenant's child or another adult.
- 2.11 One spare bedroom is allowed for:
- an approved foster carer who is between placements but only for up to 52 weeks from the end of the last placement
 - a newly approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks from the date of approval if no child is placed with them during that time

2.12 *Using the above government guidance, the general property eligibility is listed below:

- Single/Couples – 1 or 2 bed flat, or bedsit.
- Singles/Couples (with access to children) – 1 or 2 bed flat.
- Families consisting of 1 or 2 children under the age of 10 regardless of sex– 2 bed flat/apartment/house/maisonette
- Families with 2 children (Under the age of 21 of the same sex) – 2 bed flat/apartment/house or maisonette
- Families with 2 children (Over the age of 10 of different sex) – 3 bed flat/apartment/house/Maisonette
- Households with 2 children (Between 10 – 21yrs of age of different sex) – 3 bed flat/apartment/House/Maisonette
- Families with 3 children - 3 or 4 bed flat/apartment/house/maisonette
- Families with 4 or more children – 3, 4 or 5 bed flat/apartment/house/maisonette

2.13 The allocation of Bungalows has historically been reserved to those in the age group of 55+, as this type of accommodation tends to be adapted to suit people over this age range who may have limited access and mobility. However, under the 2010 Equality Act we would not discriminate against age, so in some cases we would look to reduce the age limit on some of these properties if for example a property was specifically adapted to suit the needs of a person who was under 55 years, to enable them to access housing.

2.14 Extra Care Scheme's such as Naughton Fields, Barkla Fields and Hazlehurst, will be allocated strictly to those over 55's years and following an assessment from our Independent Living Team.

2.15 Halton Housing have a small number of properties that have been allocated in areas where there is a high demand from people over the age of 55. As these areas have been sustainable historically, we reserve the right to continue to allocate the following streets/areas to applicants who are over 55 years of age.*

- Lavender Close, Runcorn (Bungalows)
- Coronation Road, Runcorn (Bungalows)
- Thorn Road, Runcorn, (Bungalows)
- Rowan Close, Runcorn (Bungalows)
- Russell Court, Widnes (Bungalows)

2.16 Our total stock level for bungalow type accommodation is 1749 at the time of writing, to which 51 units (2.91%) will have a 55+ year age limit applied when relet.

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- 2.17 * HH may reduce age limit in cases where original shortlists have been exhausted to ensure properties are allocated swiftly whilst still ensuring a balanced mixed of age-appropriate tenants within the community
- 2.18 In some circumstances we would allow under occupation, but only in cases as stated below:
- Where an affordability assessment had been completed and long-term sustainability had been sufficiently evidenced
 - Demand for such property was low, and full occupancy was not possible via any other means
 - A person was pregnant and could provide evidence via a MATB1 form
- 2.19 The Neighbourhood Allocations Manager will be primarily responsible for implementation of this policy however all the Neighbourhood Managers will have joint responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of the policy as the allocation requests will be considered and agreed collectively.
- 2.20 The Neighbourhood Allocations Advisors will be responsible for the allocations and will be expected to carry out pre-tenancy assessments, viewings, and sign ups of all change of tenancies identified under this policy.

3. Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance

- 3.1 This lettings policy is compliant with the following legislation:
- The Housing Act 1985 (As amended by the Housing Act 1996 – Part 6)
 - Homelessness Act 2002
 - The Homeless Reduction Act 2018
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Domestic Abuse Bill 2021
 - RSH Consumer Standards: Allocations and Letting Standard
 - Regulator of Social Housing 2023

4. Diversity Considerations

- 4.1 An initial screening checklist has been completed on this policy which confirms that a full Equality Impact Assessment does not need to be carried out.

5. Links to Strategies, Policies and Associated Documents

- 5.1 This policy is underpinned by the following Halton Housing and other relevant Policies:

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- Transfer Policy
 - Domestic Abuse Policy
 - Safeguarding Policy
 - Affordability Policy
 - Halton Housing/Halton Borough Council Choice Based Lettings Agreement
 - Succession Policy



Translations are available on request, by calling 0303 333 0101.

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