

Allocations Policy (Customer Service)



Policy category:	Housing	
Policy reference number:	HG_CS_HSG_120	
Version number:	3.3	
Date effective from:	22 April 2016	
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Equality Impact Assesment:	Date initial equality analysis carried out: July 2015	
	Date(s) equality analysis to be reviewed: January 2017	
Next review of policy due:	April 2019	
Document classification	Not protectively marked	
Search terms	Allocations; waiting list; nominations; choice based lettings; referrals; mutual exchanges; appeals; complaints	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the full version history of this policy, see the back page. • Please avoid referring to printed versions of this guidance. All policies and guidance can be found under 'Policy and Procedures' on the intranet. Printed versions may quickly go out of date – contact policy@homegroup.org.uk for support and advice. 		



1.0 Allocations policy statement

Our homes are let in a fair, transparent and efficient way taking into account the housing needs and aspirations of our customers and potential customers.

Home Group are committed to:

- Making the best use of available housing
- Ensuring those looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them
- Giving reasonable priority to those in most housing need
- Ensuring those at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness
- Demonstrating our lettings are compatible with the purpose of our housing
- Contributing to the local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities. Including assisting local authorities with their homelessness duties and meeting obligations in nomination agreements
- Meeting legislative, regulatory and contractual requirements
- Helping address under-occupation and overcrowding in our homes
- Supporting customers in accessing opportunities to exchange their homes with other tenants

We support our applicants' right, where possible, to choose where they live and for those communities to be sustainable. Matching the right person to the right property first time is integral to achieving this. Allocation of properties is generally made according to need and urgency and governed by time on the waiting list. As we operate in many different locations across the country, demand for properties can vary and other local issues can have an impact on lettings. In such circumstances we use Local Lettings Plans to address these specific issues, which in turn may affect who properties are offered to.

We participate in choice based lettings schemes and common housing registers with Local Authority partners and work closely with them on nominations and referrals.

Applications for housing are made through nominations from local authorities; direct applicants; choice based letting scheme bids and through our referral arrangements with our care and support services. In some areas we reserve the right to close waiting lists and only accept nominations (these decisions are managed locally). When existing customers apply for a transfer to another one of our properties, they are assessed using the same housing need criteria.

We also actively encourage our customers to use HomeSwapper, the national online database for social housing customers who are interested in moving home.

1.0 Policy scope

This policy sets out Home Group's standards of practice in relation to managing applications and allocations of housing in Customer Service. It complies with current legislative and regulatory requirements including but not limited to the following:

- Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002)
- Homes and Communities Agency Regulatory Framework
- Immigration Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001)
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2014
- Scottish Government's Social Housing Allocation: a practice guide
- Scottish Social Housing Charter

It also has regard to the Allocation of accommodation guidance for local housing authorities in England 2013 and Localism Act 2011.

This policy applies to the following business areas:

- Customer Service (England and Scotland)
- Mid-market Rent (Scotland)

It **does not** include Home Ownership (including leasehold, leasehold retirement and Shared Ownership).

Standards

Standard 1: Access

We provide clear information, in a variety of formats, about the application process and eligibility criteria for housing. We treat every applicant as an individual and aim to understand their needs. We try to give applicants an indication of the number of houses that have become available in the area(s) they are looking for and encourage them to apply for housing with other housing providers in the area to increase their options.

Standard 2: Transparency

We enable applicants to understand the letting schemes that operate in the areas they wish to be housed. This will include our waiting list, where it is in use, Local Authority Nomination arrangements and Choice Based Lettings Schemes. In England, if we have closed the waiting list in an area due to over demand, we will make this clear to the applicant. Each applicant receives a written decision on the outcome of their application, the letter includes information on how the applicant can appeal the decision if they wish to do so.

Standard 3: Fairness

We provide a fair and transparent lettings process that meets the needs of new and existing customers whilst contributing to building and maintaining sustainable communities. This means that we give reasonable preference to households in housing need but may also consider the needs of the wider community. The decision to allocate a specific property will include an overall assessment of the potential sustainability of the tenancy and its contribution to maintaining a stable and balanced community.

Our room requirements (which set out the criteria of the size of property we will offer) incorporate the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) criteria for social housing, but allow us to allocate slightly larger accommodation when there is a business need to do so.

Standard 4: Co-operation

We work closely and collaborate with Local Authorities at a strategic and operational level to provide sustainable housing solutions for people in housing need. This means we are responsive to Local Authorities' requests for assistance and have entered agreements to give Local Authorities the right to nominate people on their waiting list for housing. These agreements can be for as much as 100% of the properties we have available to let. We also participate in Choice Based Lettings

Schemes aimed at giving people in housing need an opportunity to bid for available housing in their area.

Standard 5: Housing Support

We provide information and assistance to applicants and will work with their representative when they have asked us to do so. We also signpost applicants to other support services they may need.

Standard 6: Supporting colleagues

We enable colleagues to be aware of their responsibilities and options when dealing with all aspects of allocations and lettings; be clear about the processes for applications, Local Authority nominations and referrals, choice based lettings and mutual exchanges. We work consistently across the organisation and develop and support sustainable communities.

Standard 7: Meeting business requirements

We are one of the UK's largest providers of supported housing managed by Care and Support Services. We have working arrangements in place to allow a small proportion of available properties to be designated for the use of supported accommodation.

Standard 8: Referral arrangements with Care and Support

We recognise the importance of supporting Care and Support clients who are living in supported accommodation to achieve more secure housing when they are ready to take that step. Customer Service and Care and Support have a protocol in place to support clients, this approach helps clients to manage their way towards independent housing. The protocol also helps our customers who wish to be referred for housing support.

Standard 9: Appeals and complaints

We have clear processes for applicants who feel their application has not been dealt with in accordance with this policy, or that any representative of Home Group has treated them unfairly or unreasonably.

Standard 10: Maintaining standards of probity

We have policies and procedures to support colleagues in maintaining the highest standards of behaviour and integrity at work. This ensures that governing body members and employees declare and manage openly any conflicts of interest and ensure they do not benefit improperly from their position. As part of the application process we ask if the applicant is or was in the past 12 months an employee of Home Group, a Board member or a relative of them. In cases where there is a declaration, care will be taken to ensure we comply with all relevant legislation, regulatory guidance and best practice when dealing with their application.

Standard 11: Recording and monitoring

We follow a standard process when a property becomes available to let, this ensures properties are let quickly and within policy. Periodic checks are undertaken to ensure compliance with the policy and procedure. We record all lettings as required by the Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) system in England and the Scottish Continuous Recording System in Scotland (SCORE).

Standard 12: Consultation

We consult with relevant stakeholders (e.g. customers) before making significant changes to this policy.

Key definitions

Word / phrase	Definition
Applicants	<p>The person who is applying for housing, we will accept applications from joint applicants.</p> <p>For the purposes of this policy all applicants, including existing customers will be referred to as 'applicants'.</p>
Care and Support	Home Group is one of the UK's largest providers of supported accommodation and housing support services. Customer Service/Care and Support have a joint working protocol.
CORE	CORE (Continuous Recording) is a national information source funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government that records information on the characteristic of both private registered and local authority new social tenants and the homes they rent and buy. The information allows policy makers and practitioners to monitor housing costs and assess affordability.
Customers	Home refers to tenants as customers.
Applicant's right to appeal or complain	An applicant who is unhappy with the decision made on their application or allocation has the right to appeal against that decision. If the applicant is unhappy with the service they receive they have the right to complain.
Eligible for social housing	<p>To be eligible the applicant needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be over 18 years old or 16 and 17 with a guarantor – England only • Be over 16 years – Scotland only • Be in housing need (for example homeless, overcrowded, moving to take up employment) – England only • Have permanent residence in the UK either holding a British passport or granted indefinite or limited leave to remain. Those subject to certain immigration restrictions are not eligible to register for housing.
Exceptions to room requirements criteria	In areas where there is a mismatch of housing and demand for housing, Home Group retains the right to allocate out with its specified room requirements in exceptional circumstances and Home Group will only do so where the applicant can evidence they can pay the rent that's due including any shortfall in housing benefit.
Exclusions – England	<p>We will consider excluding applicants for housing in England in certain circumstances. These are the applicant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has been convicted of a criminal offence, or been subject to possession proceedings for conducting a tenancy in an unsatisfactory manner of any kind in the last two years (evidence required) • Owes housing related debt to their current or former landlord • Has a vulnerability requiring support needs so great that a tenancy cannot be sustained. <p>The circumstances of each case are considered carefully and the applicant will be given a written explanation of why they have been excluded from the waiting list. The letter will explain what</p>

	action the applicant can take to resolve the issue. When the issue is resolved within the agreed period, the applicant is registered for housing with the original application date.
Banding scheme	Home Group uses a banding system to assess housing need. Applicants are placed in a band that best reflects their current housing need. Applications are held in date order and if an applicant's housing need changes they can move into another band. The applicant holds their original date of application. The legislation differs in England and Scotland and the banding system varies to reflect this.
Homelessness	The legal definition of homelessness differs in England and Scotland, as do our responsibilities to meet the needs of homeless people.
Lettings	A letting is the granting of a tenancy for a specific property to an applicant. Lettings must be made in accordance with the Local Lettings Policy for the area. All allocations to applicants in each priority band will be awarded in date order. All decisions are recorded and monitored.
MAPPA	Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements. Statutory agencies, including Police and Local Authorities have a duty to work together to manage the community safety issues relating to high risk offenders (while the details differ in England and Scotland the principles are the same).
Nomination agreements	Historically local authorities have often 'nominated' tenants from their own lists to an agreed percentage of a housing association's annual vacancies. Nomination agreements are not based in statute, so partners are free to agree the terms of the agreements. But it is good practice to make sure that any such agreements have clear aims and are based on a robust analysis of need and demand. There also needs to be clear guidelines for accepting or rejecting nominees and for resolving disputes. Home Group has entered agreements for up to 100% of properties to be allocated through nomination agreements.
Rejection – England	Rejection of an applicant is where someone applying for housing does not meet our eligibility criteria for housing and they are unlikely ever to meet our eligibility criteria. To exclude them for a period of time would raise false expectations of being housed; therefore it is unnecessary. Such an example may be where someone has no housing need at all. Where people's circumstances change, they can re-apply for housing.
Review of applications	The applicant is responsible for informing us of any change in their housing situation – for example, a new baby; child reaching their 10 th or 16 th birthday when this makes a difference to the size of property the applicant will require; someone joining or leaving the household.
Room requirements	Home Group has incorporated the DWP room size criteria for social housing into its room requirements.
Section 5 referral (Scotland)	Section 5 of the 2001 Act gave registered providers the duty to house statutory homeless people. Registered Providers have to meet section 5 requests from local authorities unless there are good reasons not to.
SCORE	Scottish Continuous Recording System in Scotland (SCORE) collects information from all social landlords, to record key information for all lettings across Scotland. Like CORE the information provides important information for strategic planning.

Suspension – Scotland	<p>A “suspension” is when someone who has been accepted onto the Housing Register, is told that they will not be eligible for an allocation or an offer of housing until:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certain period has elapsed or • Their conduct has changed or • A change in circumstances has occurred <p>We will only suspend an application where we consider it reasonable to do so and then only after considering the individual circumstances of the case. Any decision to suspend an application will be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on consideration and evaluation of robust evidence • Subjected to a test of reasonableness • Reviewed on an individual basis
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2.0 Supporting documents

In order to comply with Home Group’s approach to allocations in Customer Service and achieve the standards set out above, the processes and guidance listed below must be followed in line with stated roles and responsibilities.

Reference no.	Title
G120a	Application and assessment
G120aa	Identification
G120ae	Transfer guidance
G120b	Eligibility and exclusions – England
G120c	Suspensions – Scotland
G120d	Eligibility for house size and type
G120e	Emergency and management transfer
G120f	Housing advice at first point of contact
G120g	Managing a waiting list
G120h	Common housing registers and CBL
G120i	Tenancy support
G120j	Rent payments in advance
G120k	Re-housing a minor
G120l	Sheltered accommodation
G120m	Re-housing sex offenders
G120n	Maintaining standards of probity
G120p	Legal and regulatory framework
G120q	Constructing and using local lettings plans

G120r	Appeals process
G120s	Shared Ownership
G120t	Right to rent
G120u	Definition of homelessness
G120v	Entering post lettings feedback – Open Door
G120w	Under-occupation and welfare reform
G120x	Banding
G120y	Banding – Scotland
G120z	Customer Service/Care and Support protocol

3.0 Version history

Version No.	Description of changes
3.2	Bedroom requirement criteria amended to incorporate DWP size criteria. Eligibility and exclusions England and the suspensions criteria Scotland have been amended to provide information on how we manage applications for housing from applicants who are directly affected by welfare reform, wish to move to another property and have housing related debt. Policy standards introduced reflecting new regulatory requirements.
3.3	Policy put into new template. Wording refreshed so that is clearer (principles and standards remain unchanged). Legislation amended to include Immigration Act 2014.