

ALLOCATIONS AND LETTINGS POLICY

Responsible Officer

Director of Customer Services

Aim of the Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out how we meet the housing needs of applicants and tenants who apply for rehousing. Phoenix aims to be open, honest and clear about how it allocates properties in line with Lewisham's Allocation Scheme.

We will achieve this by:

- Meeting our legal and regulatory requirements.
- Giving reasonable preference to those in housing need.
- Implementing a local lettings policy to address particular housing needs in the Phoenix area.
- Maximising the choices available to our tenants.
- Improving the information available to enable tenants to make an informed choice.
- Working closely with the local authority and other agencies such as The Health Service, the police and other social landlords to assess an applicant's need for rehousing, and to make the best match within available resources.

Policy Scope

This document sets out the standards and guidance that we will apply in the selection of applicants and tenants when allocating and letting our properties.

Policy Statement

We are committed to providing good quality homes and services in a transparent, fair and accountable manner. We will put reasonable steps in place to eliminate fraudulent housing applications and take appropriate action where necessary.

We aim to achieve this by meeting the following objectives:

- Make the best use of available homes.
- Keep empty property periods to a minimum.
- Accurately describe the property and rent charged.
- Identify before or at sign up any issues which may make it difficult for the tenant(s) to sustain their tenancy
- Work in partnership with local authorities to enable them to fulfil their duties and allocate available homes through local common housing registers, choice-based lettings and right to move schemes or where necessary.
- Meet specific local objectives through local lettings policies.

- Promote mobility and provide existing residents with opportunities to move.
- Produce plans to create sustainable and balanced communities.

We will also ensure that potential tenants are provided with the appropriate support to assist them in sustaining their tenancy. We will work closely with other agencies to identify and provide support where it is required.

Properties will normally be allocated based on our guidelines for bed space standards and will not breach statutory standards for overcrowding.

Tenancies will be offered in line with our Tenure Policy.

The Policy

To meet the duty of assisting local authorities and our transfer responsibilities, we will allocate properties in line with the local authority's annual lettings plan, and select households from the listed applicant sources.

We will allocate homes to applicants based on the number of bedrooms the household requires.

A separate bedroom will be allocated to each:

- married or cohabiting couple
- adult aged 21 years or more
- pair of adolescents aged 10-20 of the same sex
- pair of children aged under 10 regardless of sex

Where a local authority's housing medical advisor recommends that a household requires an extra bedroom on medical grounds, we will take this into account when allocating homes.

Sources

Homesearch Nominations

We advertise our empty properties on Homesearch, and applicants registered on the local authority waiting list are able to bid for these properties.

We are currently expected to give the local authority all of our empty properties to be allocated via the housing waiting list; however, we also have additional housing options for our tenants.

Chain Lettings

The Chain Letting Scheme provides a fair and consistent approach to re-housing existing tenants who are underoccupying, affected by welfare reforms or have an urgent need for rehousing such as domestic abuse, harassment or on welfare grounds regardless of whether they are in arrears.

Each case will be considered on an individual basis and must be approved by a Housing Manager or the Head of Housing.

Properties that are released will be offered to the local authority for allocation. Tenants can downsize or be offered a similar property “Like for Like.” No housing gain will be allowed unless there are special circumstances, and these will be recorded and reported to the local authority.

Transfers will also be used to promote the best use of housing stock and can be offered to any priority group on the housing register, in order to maximise the number of chain lets that can be facilitated.

Reciprocal arrangements

Local authorities or another social housing provider may ask us to house their tenant and in return they will agree to house one of our existing tenants.

These applications will only be accepted where the local authority or social housing provider can show that the household has overriding priority on their waiting list and requires accommodation that they do not have available.

Direct applications

We may operate separate waiting lists in order to reduce the difficulty in letting specific homes. This may occur in the allocation of:

- Over 55 blocks
- Bedsits

Decants

It may become necessary for us to carry out unplanned repairs or improvements, major repair works or disposals where tenants will be required to vacate their property. In these circumstances, we will provide alternative temporary or permanent accommodation through our Chain Letting Scheme.

Persons who pose a risk

The decision whether to accept a nomination from a local authority for a person who poses a risk/an ongoing risk to either children (Schedule 1 offender) or others will be made following a risk assessment.

The decision will depend on:

- individual circumstances.
- the information received.
- the level of risk that the nominee presents and the adequacy of control measures / support packages in place and,
- the location of the property and the profile of the existing residents in the area.

Contractor Temporary Lettings

Occasionally we will permit contractors to use residential and non-residential units for a period of time when undertaking major work contracts. These lettings are by exception and will only be agreed if the property cannot currently be let on a permanent basis.

Offers and Refusals

For an offer to be reasonable, accommodation must meet the essential size (except Chain Letting Scheme) and assessed needs of the household. It must also be sound and fit for habitation. Where possible we will aim to satisfy the applicant's preference for accommodation.

An applicant who rejects three offers may be suspended from the housing register for 12 months by the local authority. The local authority may also consider not attending an appointment to make an accompanied viewing of a property as a rejected offer.

One offer only allocations apply to applicants who need to move urgently. For example, through the Emergency Housing Panel.

Where false information is known to have been given by an applicant, we will use our discretion and may refuse the application.

Exclusions

We will not normally make offers of accommodation where the following exclusions apply:

- the applicant owns and/or has access to a suitable home of appropriate size and type
- The applicant has access to a suitable home of the appropriate size and type by virtue of a secure or assured tenancy agreement which they do not intend to relinquish
- The applicant's income and level of savings are sufficient to purchase a property of an appropriate size
- The applicant does not have a rent account balance of zero and/or has outstanding former tenant arrears at the point of being offered social housing.

Where the applicant is deemed to have behaved unacceptably in the past i.e. breached the terms of a tenancy with us or another social housing provider, for example:

- Persistent failure to pay rent
- Serious or persistent anti-social behaviour
- Acts of violence against staff

Appeals

We recognise that any applicant has the right to appeal about a decision:

- Complaints should be initially referred to the relevant Housing Officer.

- If an applicant remains dissatisfied, appeals may be made using the Complaints Policy at Stage 2.

Monitoring and review

We will ensure that

- Targets are set and key performance indicators are recorded and monitored to ensure the service is delivered effectively and improvements identified.
- Staff receive relevant training and information to enable them to provide high quality services.
- Clear and concise information is published about our service and the standards that can be expected.
- Performance information is regularly reported to our Board.

We will review this policy and supporting procedures every 3 years or sooner if required by legislation, good practice or other learning.

Legislation

The Housing Act 1985 sets out our obligation to publish rules on allocating properties. It also states the statutory minimum room sizes for the purposes of overcrowding.

In carrying out allocations and lettings we will also consider our obligations, and comply with other relevant legislation, which includes:

- Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Housing Act 1988, 1996, 2004
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Localism Act 2011
- Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012
- Housing & Planning Act 2016
- Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Coronavirus Act 2020

Reference to other documents and associated policies and procedures

Including:

- London Borough of Lewisham Allocations Scheme 2017
- Homeseach Protocol
- Chain Lettings Procedure
- Aids & Adaptations Policy
- Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy
- Data Protection Policy & Toolkit
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Equality and Diversity Charter
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Phoenix Standards
- Safeguarding Policy
- Supporting Residents 'At Risk' Policy
- Temporary Decant Procedure
- Tenants' Handbook
- Tenure Policy

Definitions

Term/acronym	Description
Resident	Includes tenants, freeholders and leaseholders.
Phoenix	Phoenix Community Housing.

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