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LETTINGS POLICY

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Summary

This Policy details how we allocate our properties in line with existing nomination agreements and within service level agreements across a range of tenures to reduce re-let times and minimise rental loss from voids and empty homes.

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PART TWO

Policy

Intent

This Policy sets out how we will allocate and let properties to both new and existing customers, across the Group, in a fair, transparent and efficient way.

Principles

The Group will provide an effective lettings service that meets the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), tenancy standard and the criteria below.

Ensure there is consistency across Longhurst Group, whilst recognising local variations.

Reflect the communities we work in and ensure that these communities are sustainable.

Support the provision of a range of affordable homes for single people, couples and families as well as specific schemes for older people and those with special or support needs.

Actively assist local authorities to carry out their statutory functions (as detailed in Appendix A).

Minimise the time that properties are left unoccupied.

Take a proactive approach to ensure that no individual or group is discriminated against or treated differently as a direct or indirect result of our Lettings Policy;

Invest in Social Value. From time to time we will work with local partners to meet housing needs for a specific group of people.

Scope

This policy applies to all parts of the Longhurst Group.

This policy applies to all customers who register interest in housing with us, up to the stage of tenancy agreement.

Customers who apply for one of our properties through Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes will also be subject to this policy unless there are agreed local arrangements in place.

Policy Details

Managing lettings

Applying for Housing

Longhurst Group do not operate waiting lists for housing and therefore any individuals seeking a home with us will need to register directly with the Local Authority and their chosen nomination scheme, for example, Choice Based Lettings. Registering for housing through the Local Authority does not guarantee the applicant will be housed by Longhurst Group.

We reserve the right through our nominations agreements to use fast track lettings, through such methods as Rightmove, across Longhurst Group.

Eligibility

Certain groups of people are currently ineligible by law to be considered for social housing.

We will assess each case individually following Government guidelines.

Sustainability

We will use our Sustainability Matrix not only to assess whether an applicant can afford to live in one of our homes, but also to check that they are ready for a tenancy and can sustain one. The financial metrics used are in line with the Consumer Price Index and are updated yearly. Regional variances will be taken into account within agreed frameworks.

We will also use our sustainability matrix to assess an applicant's background to ascertain if there is any risk in offering a property in a particular area or location to the applicant themselves, any other individual, the property itself, the local community and/or members of staff.

We will not re-house or offer a property to any customer who has not demonstrated that they can sustain a tenancy once pre-tenancy checks have been completed.

Homeowners

Customers who are homeowners may apply for re-housing if they meet any of the criteria below:

- they need sheltered accommodation;
- their mortgage lender is repossessing their home;
- their relationship has broken down and as a result they need to sell their home;
- their current home is unsuitable due to serious ill health or disability; or
- the Applicant has separated and left the family home, but remains a mortgage holder for financial reasons.

Housing Employees

Applications can be accepted from employees, elected members, Board members and their close relatives, provided they are eligible to apply. Applicants must disclose any such relationship at the time of applying and approval will be sought at the point of allocation to demonstrate that appropriate levels of probity have been applied. The Executive Director of Housing Services will authorise or reject any applications for housing.

Housing Older People

Applicants will be assessed in the usual way and should also:

- be aged 60 or over; however; we may consider younger applicants where there are relevant needs such as a physical disability; and
- be able to live safely and independently when the tenancy is agreed.

Local variations may be in place. For example, applications for Rutland homes are accepted from people over 50 due to low numbers of applicants in some schemes.

Rehousing Minors

Applicants aged 16 and 17, will be given a tenancy in trust until they are 18. A starter tenancy will be issued at 18 provided there are no tenancy breaches.

Applicant criteria - the applicant(s) have a dependent child or they are expecting a baby; and/or:

- their Local Authority has accepted them as homeless; and
- their support needs have been assessed and they are able to maintain a tenancy without additional support, or have support in place; and
- they are entitled to the housing element of universal credit.

Best use of stock

We will work with applicants using our Sustainability Matrix to ensure they are applying for housing that is affordable and sustainable.

Accessible properties for people with a disability – in the first instance we will work with the local authority to allocate the property. If no suitable applicants can be found, we will contact social services and other relevant agencies before making an allocation to someone who does not need an adapted property.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) Level 3 Offender– where we know we are housing a MAPPA Level 3 offender, we will seek appropriate advice and information from the Police, Social Services and Probation. A MAPPA Level offender is as defined in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and subsequent relevant legislation.

Children in flats – we will not let flats above the ground floor to families with children aged under seven years. We will let ground floor flats to families with children of any age.

Children Sharing a Room – we will apply the following rules in line with government legislation outlined in the social sector size criteria deductions when reviewing a nomination or application for housing that involves children of the same or different sex sharing a bedroom. We will allow the following to share a bedroom;

- Two children of the same sex under 16;
- Two children of either sex under 10.

Fast Track Lettings

Our preferred method of letting our homes is to work with Local Authorities in accordance with local arrangements. Where a Local Authority is unable to nominate or a shortlist is exhausted we will implement our Fast Track Lettings Process.

A property will be classified as suitable for Fast Track if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

- The Local Authority (LA) has been unable to supply a nomination/shortlist in accordance with the nomination agreement. This is referred to as a failure to nominate;
- where nominations have been supplied, the permitted number of refusals under the nomination's agreement has been reached;
- where we are exercising our own nomination rights, particularly where we are concerned about the continued sustainability of a scheme; and/or
- if we have a Local Lettings Plan in place.

Where a property has been classified as suitable for Fast Track letting, we may choose to advertise using one or more of the following methods. This list is not exhaustive and we may advertise through other media.

- National lettings websites such as Rightmove.
- Local press;
- Our websites
- Facebook and other social and digital media channels
- Local agencies such as Age Concern.

We will all allow current tenants who hold a tenancy with Longhurst Group to apply for a home with us through Rightmove or any other home letting service.

Excluding applicants

There are occasions when we will have to exclude an applicant. Applicants can appeal exclusion by writing or emailing to us outlining the reasons for appeal.

Applicants have supplied significantly false or misleading information on their application for housing

Applicants or members of their household have had legal action taken against them for unacceptable behaviour or breaches of tenancy; and/or were subject to legal proceedings

against their tenancy before they left; or have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour which, if our tenants, would have entitled us to take legal action against their tenancy.

Applicants have a history of violence, harassment, racial harassment, threatening behaviour or any other forms of antisocial behaviour.

Previous physical or verbal abuse towards staff or contractors working for Longhurst Group or another landlord.

Deterioration of the current or former home due to waste, neglect or default by the person or any member of the household or other breaches of tenancy

Using the premises for the sale or supply of illegal drugs.

These exclusions will not apply where the unacceptable behaviour took place two or more years before the date of the application and the applicant or relevant household member has sustained a tenancy satisfactorily in the meantime.

Debt

If an applicant owes rent or debt for rechargeable repairs with their current or former landlord, we will only progress their application if they have paid 80% or more of the total debt owed on a continuous payment cycle before shortlisting/nomination. There must be no missed payments in breach of their agreement to pay.

Where applicants are excluded, they will be informed in writing of the reasons for our decision.

The reasons for exclusion above are not exhaustive and we will consider each case individually.

Roles and Responsibilities

Legal responsibility for the lettings Policy is held jointly by:

- Longhurst Group Chief Executive; and
- Executive Director of Housing Services

Operational responsibility for the Lettings Policy is held by the Director of Housing and Head of Housing Services.

Procedural responsibility for the Lettings Policy is held by Housing Managers/Team Leaders

Day-to-day responsibility for the Lettings policy is held by Team Leaders, Lettings Advisors and Housing Officers.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Performance data for lettings and voids will be produced each month by the Quality Assurance team.

Information on re-lets against local authority nomination agreement service level agreements will be provided, as applicable, at a local level through the Lettings team.

Each region will carry out monthly audits to monitor compliance. Regular checks will also be completed by our auditors.

This policy will be reviewed every three years. In addition, it will be reviewed:

- following information suggesting that the policy is not effective;
- to reflect any service enhancements; and/or
- following the introduction of relevant new legislation, regulations or guidance.

Summary of local variations

Local Authority letting arrangements are listed in Appendix A.

PART THREE

Appendices

- A. Lettings Arrangements by Local Authority Area
- B. Definitions
- C. Lettings
- D. Policy Approval Control
- E. Policy Development Plan

4.2a Appendix 1 - Lettings Arrangements by LA area

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Amber Valley	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Name of scheme: Home-Options - part of sub regional CBL with Amber Valley, Derbyshire Dales and High Peak.
Bassetlaw	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Name of scheme: HomeFinder.
Birmingham	Yes	Part	No	50% 75% 4 beds	No	Yes	Yes	Birmingham Home Choice
Blaby	Yes	Yes	No	95%	No	Yes	No	Part of wider Leicestershire CBL scheme
Boston Borough	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Name of scheme: Homechoice.
Broxtowe	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Name of scheme: Homesearch - part of sub-regional CBL with Broxtowe and Rushcliffe.

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Charnwood	Yes	Yes	No	95%	No	Yes	Yes	Part of wider Leicestershire CBL scheme
Corby	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Keyways
Derby	Yes	Yes	No	90%	No	Yes	Yes	Derby Homefinder
East Lindsey	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Direct housing register for sheltered applicants only.
East Northants	Yes	Yes	No	75%	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	East Northants are not part of the Northamptonshire sub regional group
Erewash	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Name of scheme: Home-Options - part of sub regional CBL with Amber Valley, Derbyshire Dales and High Peak.
Gedling	Yes	Yes	No	100%	No	No	No	Name of scheme: Homesearch - part of sub-regional CBL with Broxtowe and Rushcliffe. Low demand properties are advertised.

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Harborough	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Harborough Home Search (Part of Leicestershire sub-regional scheme)
Kings Lynn	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	No	No	Name of scheme: West Norfolk Homechoice.
Leicester City	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Yes	No	
Lincoln City	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Yes	No	Name of scheme: Lincs Homefinder - part of a sub-regional CBL with West Lindsey and North Kesteven. Direct housing register for sheltered applicants only.

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Mansfield	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Name of scheme: Mansfield & Ashfield Homefinder - joint CBL scheme with Ashfield Homes.
Melton	Yes	Yes	No	95%	No	Yes	No	Part of wider Leicestershire CBL scheme
Newark & Sherwood	Yes	No	No	100%	No	No	No	Easylet
North East Lincolnshire	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Joint CBL scheme with North Lincolnshire. Homechoicelincs

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
North Kesteven	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Yes	No	Name of scheme: Lincs Homefinder - part of a sub-regional CBL with West Lindsey and Lincoln City Council. Direct housing register for sheltered applicants only.
North Lincolnshire	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	No	No	Joint CBL with North East Lincolnshire. Homechoicelincs
North West Leicestershire	Yes	Yes	No	95%	No	Yes	No	Part of wider Leicestershire CBL scheme
Northants North & South	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Sub regional scheme for Kettering, Corby, Wellingborough called "Keyways"

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Nottingham City	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Name of scheme: Homelink. We only use our transfer rights for stock disposal.
Nuneaton & Bedworth	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Yes	No	Homehunt CBL No formal Nominations Agreement or SLA in place.
Peterborough	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	No	No	
Rushcliffe	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Yes	No	

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Rutland	Yes	No	Yes	75%	Yes	Yes	No	
South Holland	Yes	No	No	100%	No	No	No	
South Cambridgeshire	Yes	Yes	No	100%	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Home Link
South Kesteven	Yes	No	No	100%	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	

Local Authority	Local Authority Registration Point	Choice Based? (CBL)	Common Allocation Policy?	% Noms to LA	L&H Direct Applicants accepted?	L&H Direct Transfers accepted?	List Closed?	Comments
Walsall	Yes	Yes	No	50%	No	Yes 10% Agreed	No	
Warwick	Yes	Yes	No	100%	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Home Choice
West Lindsey	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	No	Management priority only - less than 5% per year	No	Name of scheme: Lincs Homefinder – part of a sub-regional CBL with West Lindsey and Lincoln City. Low demand properties are advertised.

Definitions

Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

These schemes are often established by partnerships of local authorities and/or housing associations. CBL's are designed to introduce an element of choice for people who apply for council and housing association homes that are advertised for rent, rather than waiting to be offered housing through a waiting list system. The allocation of the home is based upon a points based or other priority based assessment of need of those who have made a bid for a home.

Nominations Agreement

A service level agreement where a housing association and a local authority will work in partnership to address housing need within the local area. The housing association will accept an agreed percentage of applicants from the local authority rehousing list when properties become vacant.

Transfers

An allocation by where we allow an existing tenant to transfer to another one of our homes. Refer to our Transfer policy

Failed/Lack of Nominations

Where a local authority has been unable to make a suitable nomination.

Tenancy Agreements

The associations properties will be let on either, assured tenancies, starter tenancies or Assured Shorthold tenancies.

New tenants will initially be signed up for a 12-month trial period, known as a starter tenancy. The tenancy will convert to an assured tenancy upon satisfactory completion of the trial period.

Assured Shorthold tenancies are offered to those being accommodated in specific supported housing schemes and for properties that we manage. Exceptions include the provision of temporary accommodation in partnership with the local authority where a licence/use and occupation agreement will be used.

Local Variations

There may be specific lettings criteria for some housing schemes e.g. where Section 106 planning agreements are in place or for other schemes such as allocations under the Seaside & Country Homes scheme. Restrictions can include requirement to have a defined local connection with the scheme concerned.

Fixed Term Tenancies

Introduced as part of the Localism Act 2011, Longhurst Group will continue to consider the introduction of fixed-term tenancies as part of our suite of tenancies however the Group currently has no plans to offer this type of tenancy currently.

Appendix C – Lettings

Housing Homeowners

Customers who are home-owners may apply for re-housing if they meet any of the criteria below;

- they need sheltered accommodation
- their mortgage lender is repossessing their home
- their relationship has broken down and as a result they need to sell their home
- their current home is unsuitable due to serious ill health or disability.
- Applicants who have separated and left the family home, but remain a mortgage holder for financial reasons