



# Lettings Policy

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Lettings Policy (the Policy) outlines the principles and approach taken to determine the allocations and lettings of the properties we manage.

## 2.0 Purpose

- 2.1 Our homes are let in a fair, transparent, and efficient way, in accordance with relevant legal and regulatory frameworks. Specifically, this policy ensures that the allocation and letting of our homes meets the Regulator of Social Housing's expectations set out within the Consumer Regulations, including the Tenancy Standard.
- 2.2 This policy outlines the approach to allocating homes and signposts to specific lettings Policies in place across geographical area(s) where we provide homes.
- 2.3 The purpose of this policy is to:
  - To make the best use of our stock and to maintain sustainable and balanced local communities
  - To meet the needs of those people who need housing
  - Ensure our approach to letting homes is open, transparent, and fair, providing reasonable preference to those in priority need
  - Provides choice wherever possible for housing applicants
  - Supports the strategic ambitions of strategic housing partners and those of Livin
  - Help let our homes as quickly as possible, minimising rent loss and making the process of letting homes efficient
  - Ensure our approach adheres to the relevant legislative and regulatory environment

## 3.0 Principles

- 3.1 We are committed to sustaining tenancies in sustainable places, and we will seek to assist and support tenants to remain in our homes wherever possible.

3.2 We will work in partnership with relevant Local Authorities and local stakeholders to ensure our homes are allocated equitably and efficiently and to support delivery of strategic housing responsibilities.

## 4.0 Definitions

4.1 The key terms used in this policy are defined below.

Local lettings plan	Plans are used by Registered Providers and Local Authorities to develop policies and letting solutions that respond to specific local housing need and demand
Nominations agreement	An agreement negotiated between a Local Authority and a Registered Provider (RP) which guarantees the Authorities' ability to access RP owned accommodation
Lettings policy	The criteria through which social homes will be allocated
Choice based lettings (CBL)	The system for registering new housing applications and advertising properties for let

## 5.0 Scope

5.1 This policy is relevant to all our employees and stakeholders who may deliver or manage allocations and lettings of our homes.

## 6.0 Contribution to Plan A

6.1 This policy contributes directly to the delivery of Plan A by ensuring our homes are allocated fairly and effectively, contributing to sustainable tenancies and communities.

6.2 The policy contributes to the delivery the following strategic objectives:

- Objective 12: Deliver effective support interventions that meet

individual needs

- Objective 15: Proactively utilise allocations and lettings to positively contribute to tenancy sustainment

## 7.0 Legislative and regulatory framework

7.1 The legislative and regulatory framework governing social housing allocations in England is primarily set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), which requires local authorities to have an allocations scheme for determining priorities and procedures for allocating homes within their boundaries. The Localism Act 2011 provides further flexibility for local authorities, allowing them to set their own qualification criteria and make best use of their housing stock.

7.2 The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) requires registered providers to let their homes in a fair, transparent, and efficient way and contribute to local authorities' strategic housing functions and sustainable communities. These requirements are set out within the Tenancy Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

7.3 Registered providers are also required to enable tenants to gain access to opportunities to exchange their tenancy with that of another tenant, by way of internet-based mutual exchange.

## 8.0 Policy statements

8.1 Choice Based Lettings

8.2 We participate in four regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Schemes which allocate homes according to the criteria set out in separate allocation policies:

- 1) Durham Key Options (Durham County Council) allocates homes according to the criteria set out in the Durham Key Options Lettings Policy.
- 2) Darlington HomeSearch (Darlington Borough Council) allocates homes according to the criteria set out in Darlington Borough Council Housing Services Allocations Policy.
- 3) Tees Valley Homefinder (Tees Valley Lettings Partnership) which incorporates Middlesbrough Council, Redcar and

Cleveland Borough Council, and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) allocates homes according to the criteria set out in the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership Common Allocations Policy.

4) Hartlepool Home Search (Hartlepool Borough Council) via the Hartlepool Borough Council Allocations Policy.

- 8.3 Our homes are allocated in accordance with the allocations and lettings criteria applicable within these CBL schemes, except where there are local lettings plans in place that vary the allocations criteria within those locations.
- 8.4 In exceptional circumstances, homes may be allocated to applicants via a direct offer, but these will still be offered using the allocations the criteria for the relevant Choice Based Lettings scheme or Local Authority Allocations Policy.
- 8.5 Mutual exchange
- 8.6 Tenants wishing to exchange locally can register for a mutual exchange within the Durham Key Options, Darlington Borough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council and Tees Valley Lettings Partnership CBL schemes. Tenants seeking to move outside of these CBL scheme areas are actively encouraged to use HomeSwapper, the national online database of social housing tenants who are wanting to move home.
- 8.7 Mutual exchange will be promoted as an avenue of choice for those seeking alternative accommodation but have no specific housing need as they are unlikely to access alternative accommodation through choice-based lettings due to demand.
- 8.8 Local Lettings Policy (LLP)
- 8.9 Local lettings policies are used where they are required to create balanced, safe and sustainable communities or in response to bespoke localised need and/or within a defined geographical boundary. They are set up to meet defined community cohesion needs and may also be used in accordance with lettings requirements set up as part of s106 agreements, for example.
- 8.10 Local lettings policies can be used in the following circumstances (not an exhaustive list):
  - Help meet unmet needs within an area
  - Help regenerate areas

- Help to target the best use of properties in higher demand areas
- Help promote properties which are in low demand
- Encourage greater community cohesion and sustainability.
- Respond to housing management issues, for example where significant problems of antisocial behaviour, nuisance or crime occur.
- Help achieve balanced communities when letting new developments.
- Make decisions on the allocation of homes in a clear and transparent manner, demonstrating the approach to equality and fairness when allocating homes.

8.11 Any advertisement of homes within a local lettings policy area will clearly set out what the local lettings criteria are as part of the advertisement.

8.12 Local lettings policies are agreed in advance with our strategic partners, are set up within a defined locality and/or to address a specific need and are reviewed regularly for appropriateness. The specific requirements for local lettings policies are set out within each individual policy.

#### Service standard performance

8.13 Applications for our homes made to the Choice Based Lettings schemes operated by Hartlepool Borough Council, Darlington Borough Council and the Local Authorities within the Tees Valley Homefinder Partnership are administered by those partner Local Authorities.

8.14 In Durham, as full partners within the Durham Key Options Partnership, we administer applications from applicants wishing to access homes within our core areas of stock.

#### Diverse needs

8.15 Our Customer Vulnerability Policy sets out our commitment and approach to how we listen to, understand, and respond to customers' specific and diverse needs or circumstances in relation to any vulnerabilities they have. This policy aims to ensure all customers experience fair and equitable outcomes when receiving our services by treating all customers as individuals, identifying and responding effectively to customers' vulnerabilities by making

reasonable adjustments to how they access and receive our services to ensure services are delivered in a fair and equitable way.

- 8.16 We will use information about a customers' circumstances and vulnerabilities when letting homes to make sure we offer them a home that meets their needs, including the provision of aids and adaptations or an already adapted home where appropriate. Through our onboarding process, we will work with customers to make sure they are able to understand their tenancy agreement, their rights, and our obligations as a landlord.
- 8.17 In relation to allocations and lettings we offer support to complete an application for housing, support bidding for available homes (including through auto-bidding), accompanied viewings, digital viewings, a digital and non-digital sign-up processes, access to translation services, and referral and access to third party support. This list is not exhaustive, and we will always seek to provide tailored support to meet individual needs where this is reasonable and practicable.

## Communication

- 8.18 We are committed to the provision of seamless, responsive and convenient services and as such are a digital first organisation. We advocate encourage and support our tenants to engage with us via the most efficient and effective method, suitable to their needs, and will assist tenants or their advocates to engage with us digitally. Digital copies of this policy and related guidance are available on our website and in an alternative format for tenants who may not be able to access services digitally or experience other communication barriers, on request.

## Feedback and complaints

- 8.19 Complaints relating to application administration in Hartlepool, Darlington, and the Tees Valley should be made to the respective local authority.
- 8.20 Applicants to the Durham Key Options scheme have the right to appeal if they feel their housing application has been wrongly assessed or the applicant believes they have been unfairly treated in the allocation process (where a property is matched to an applicant within the DKO system), have the right to appeal. Details of how to appeal are available within the Find a Home section of our website and the DKO website.

8.21 Customers are able to provide feedback about the services they have received in respect of this policy. If a customer is dissatisfied with the service they have received from us, they can make a complaint to us in line with our Customer Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy.

8.22 Specifically, we define a customer complaint as:

*"Any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own employees, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or groups of residents."*

8.23 Copies of specific local lettings policies are available on our website and are published on the relevant CBL scheme website.

## 9.0 Roles and responsibilities

9.1 Roles and responsibilities under this policy are outlined below.

Board	Board will formally approve this policy and review it every three years (or sooner if there is a change in legislation or regulation).
Director of Housing and Communities	The Director of Housing and Communities is responsible for the effective delivery of this policy.
Heads of Housing and Communities	The Head of Housing and Communities has operational responsibility for the management of allocations and lettings.
Strategic housing managers	The Strategic Housing Manager will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of allocations and lettings and ensuring associated procedures are followed.
Housing team	The Housing Team will implement the policy and procedures.

9.2 This policy will be communicated to our customers and employee via our website and intranet. Those responsible for implementing the policy will, where required, receive appropriate training, advice, and/or guidance in collaboration with respective Local Authority partners.

## 10.0 Related policies and procedures

10.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

Durham Key Options Common Lettings Policy	Sets out the criteria and procedure through which social housing will be allocated via the Durham Key Options Choice Based lettings scheme.
Durham County Council Nominations Agreement	Sets out the way in which Durham County Council will access our homes and nominate applicants from their housing register.
Tees Valley Nominations Agreement	A common nominations agreement covering the local authority partners within the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership.
Hartlepool Nominations Agreement	Sets out the way in which Hartlepool Borough Council will access our homes and nominate applicants from their housing register.
Darlington Borough Council Housing Services Allocations Policy	Sets out the criteria and procedure through which social housing will be allocated via the Darlington HomeSearch CBL scheme.
Darlington Borough Council Nominations Agreement	Sets out the way Darlington Borough Council will access our homes and nominate applicants from their housing register.

## 11.0 Monitoring, assurance and review arrangements

11.1 Monitoring and assurance of allocations and lettings is fulfilled delivered via the following reporting mechanisms:

Type of assurance	Key source	Frequency
Management assurance	DKO Performance reports	Quarterly
	CORE returns on allocations	Quarterly
	Performance Management Framework	Monthly
Corporate Oversight	Annual Allocations and Lettings Report received by Housing and Communities Committee	Annual
	Performance Report (Board)	Quarterly
	Housing Services Update Report to Housing and Communities Committee	Biennial
Independent assurance	Internal audit	As required

11.2 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, unless there is significant development that would require a more urgent review e.g. new legislation or regulation.