



POLICY DOCUMENT

Group Member: Progress Housing Group

Service Area: Housing Operations – Housing Support Services

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Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out how the Progress Housing Group (the Group) intends to allocate our properties, both new build and existing homes.
- 1.2 The policy is our commitment to the following principles:
- To contribute towards sustaining the areas in which we operate
 - To contribute to local authority housing strategies
 - To provide social housing for those who need it most for as long as they need it
 - To ensure that we make the best use of social housing while taking into account individual circumstances and local area demographics
 - To regularly review best practice for allocating properties in an efficient way
 - Where allocation schemes, such as Choice Based Lettings (CBL) partnerships, do not support our aims to relet properties promptly and sustain communities, then we will actively be involved in discussions to review and renegotiate terms.
 - To work with local authority commissioners to commission housing solutions for people with support needs
 - To ensure we let properties in accordance with the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013

2. Scope of the policy

- 2.1 This policy applies to the following homes:
- All rented accommodation within our portfolio, with the exception of Progress Living and Shared Ownership properties.
- 2.2 This policy applies to both new applicants and eligible existing tenants who wish to transfer.

3. Responsibility

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of the Service Director (Housing Operations) to approve this policy.
- 3.2 The Heads of Service across the business streams are responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented within their area and monitor performance.
- 3.3 Operational managers are responsible for ensuring policies and procedures are applied consistently within their teams, training and guidance is provided, and supporting systems are updated.

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

4. Policy

4.1 Aims & objectives

- 4.1.1 This policy covers all customers who:
- register an interest for rehousing either directly with the Group or via a CBL scheme which we are a partner of
 - are nominated to RWP living schemes by the local authority commissioner/health body or a support provider
 - are referred to homeless and refuge accommodation.
- 4.1.2 The policy aims to ensure consistent practice in allocating and letting our properties in line with local agreements and arrangements.
- 4.1.3 There may be times when the Group needs to make a discretionary allocation due to other operational challenges, such as when there is a threat to personal safety. We are committed to consulting with the local authority before implementing any particular changes that could impact more than one-off cases.

4.2 RWP

- 4.2.1 Lettings to vacancies within RWP accommodation are made through nominations from a support provider, local authority, or health commissioner.
- 4.2.2 Selection criteria for schemes are included in the management agreement or nomination agreement between the Group and the relevant commissioner or support provider.
- 4.2.3 Individuals nominated to RWP's accommodation must meet the Specialised Supported Housing eligibility criteria as detailed in The Rent Policy Statement On Rents for Social Housing, published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

4.3 Supported Housing

- 4.3.1 Lettings to vacancies within supported housing accommodation, including homeless and refuge schemes, are made via referral from a local authority, Lancashire County Council's Access to Resources Team (ART), other refuges, or self-referral.
- 4.3.2 Each supported housing scheme has a specific referral procedure that must be followed in all instances.

4.4 Choice Based Lettings and Nomination Agreements

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

4.4.1 The Group is committed to working in partnership with relevant local authorities through approved schemes such as local nomination agreements and CBL schemes.

4.4.2 Where CBL schemes are not in operation, we will liaise with the local authority regularly to review the allocations or nominations to meet local needs.

4.4.3 We will regularly review whether our allocation schemes are a cost-effective way of re-letting our properties and maintaining housing lists.

4.5 Eligibility

4.5.1 Anyone who is a UK resident who has recourse to public funds (for example, qualification for housing benefit or universal credit or an equivalent) and is over 18 years old is eligible for housing with the Group.

4.5.2 Applicants between the ages of 16 and 18 may register for housing subject to providing details of a guarantor who will agree to be a signatory of an Equitable Tenancy until the tenant turns 18 years old.

4.5.3 All applicants are subject to verification checks to ensure compliance with the Right to Rent legislation 2016 and the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013.

4.5.4 We work in partnership with our CBL partners to verify all housing applications made through the CBL system. We will request a number of documents at the application stage to confirm an applicant's identification and right to rent/settled status. Where this isn't carried out at application stage (or any allocation outside of the CBL schemes), the documents will be verified before sign up.

4.5.5 Where applicants are nominated through an agreed arrangement, for example from local authorities, the same checks will be carried out to ensure they have the right to rent.

4.6 Consideration of property size and type

4.6.1 We will make the best use of our homes, being mindful of issues such as the size and designation of the property.

4.6.2 We will consider the size and household composition of those moving when deciding on bedroom eligibility.

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

- 4.6.3 We will look at affordability for those applicants who do not meet current size standards. For example, we will consider applicants with a smaller household than the size standards where an applicant can demonstrate that they can afford the property's rent and overall running costs.
- 4.6.4 We will also consider applications for properties where there is a larger family, for example, we will consider a household with six children for a three-bedroom property where the applicants wish to consider this option (this should not however result in breaching the Housing Act 1985 overcrowding standards).
- 4.6.5 We will consider unborn children where proof of pregnancy is provided (a verified MATB1 form.)
- 4.6.6 An adult carer living permanently at the address caring for any existing household members will be expected to have their own bedroom.
- 4.6.7 Generally, additional bedrooms will only be allocated to those with equal access or staying contact with children. Evidence of an agreement and affordability will be required before a larger property can be allocated to them.
- 4.6.8 The medical needs of an applicant will be considered upon receipt of evidence provided by a health care professional.
- 4.6.9 Discretion can be exercised to override these criteria where there is an exceptional individual case.

4.7 Access to our services

- 4.7.1 Although we design our services to be as easy as possible for applicants to access, we understand that some of our applicants will require extra assistance to apply and then register an interest in properties. We will provide this extra assistance individually as agreed with the applicant where no other forms of support are available, such as a relative or support worker.
- 4.7.2 Where possible, we support a digital application process. We will provide support to applicants to enable this through our housing or customer contact teams, and enable applicants to use equipment in our offices for those who do not have access to digital devices.

4.8 Applicants with support needs

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

4.8.1 We will support applications from applicants with individual support needs and those who work with agencies to support their tenancies. We will provide adjustments where required.

4.8.2 We do not directly provide supported housing within our general needs and independent living accommodation. If, following assessment, we believe an applicant's support needs are too high to sustain a standard tenancy we will advise the applicant and their advocate and signpost as appropriate.

4.9 Housing need/statutory reasonable preference

4.9.1 We aim to provide housing predominantly for those in housing need and pay regard to statutory reasonableness and additional preference criteria referred to in the Housing Act 1996 to assist our local authority partners. The criteria is, in most cases, built into the CBL scheme that we subscribe to, but for clarity, the reasonable and additional preference criteria are:

- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- People occupying housing accommodation that is temporary or occupied on insecure terms.
- Families with dependent children
- Households consisting of or including someone who is expecting a child
- Households consisting of or including someone with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds
- Households whose social or economic circumstances mean they have difficulty securing settled accommodation.

4.9.2 Additional preference will be given to:

- Households consisting of someone with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds who cannot reasonably be expected to find settled accommodation for themselves.
- Persons who have formerly served in the regular forces as defined in section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006 and is a person with urgent housing need.

4.9.3 We also give regard to the following housing need situations and others that are assessed on a case-by-case basis:

- Under occupiers
- Victims of domestic abuse where a move is deemed urgent

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

- Supported housing tenants with approved move-on plans
- Urgent moves due to security issues, i.e. severe harassment or criminal issues
- Needs for adaptations that are best met by supporting a move to alternative accommodation with either suitable adaptations or scope to adapt in a cost-effective way
- Applicants with a medical condition that will be improved by moving
- Relationship breakdowns, including shared access in line with size criteria
- Young children living at height above two stories
- Applicants who need to move nearer support networks, or closer to work or community/voluntary work, education, or other social grounds
- Other reasons, as agreed by the Head of Housing Operations (Housing Support Services)

4.10 Transfers

- 4.10.1 Existing tenants with a need for rehousing (such as overcrowding) have the right to apply to transfer subject to the satisfactory completion of their starter tenancies and in line with any CBL policy eligibility.
- 4.10.2 Transfer applicants will be subject to the same assessments on eligibility as other housing applicants when establishing their priority, although in exceptional circumstances, the Support Services & Allocations Manager can give additional priority or approve direct matches where necessary.
- 4.10.3 A transfer will usually be declined where there are current arrears or other tenancy agreement breaches in the previous 12 months. An exception to this may be where tenants are under occupying and their situation could be improved by supporting a move.
- 4.10.4 Transfer applicants will be expected to have conducted their tenancy satisfactorily, cooperating with a pre-termination inspection to assess the upkeep of their property except in exceptional circumstances.

4.11 Home Owners

- 4.11.1 Applicants who are homeowners will be considered in line with the relevant allocation scheme, however, an offer of a property will not be made if this leads to an applicant having two homes. There will be an exception for those requiring independent

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

living or supported housing who cannot obtain this accommodation through other means.

4.12 Suspensions and appeal

- 4.12.1 Suspensions occur where applicants do not meet the eligibility criteria for different CBL schemes. These will vary depending on the scheme criteria but usually involve previous cases of evictions/due to be evicted rent arrears (including debt relief orders/bankruptcies), previous or current anti-social behaviour, or criminal convictions.
- 4.12.2 Reasons will always be provided for suspension and will identify what the applicant must do to improve their situation and qualify for the waiting list. For example, if they are suspended due to anti-social behaviour or previous evidence of failed tenancies, we may ask the applicant to work with appropriate support workers or agencies before approaching us again to consider their application. We will be clear about what action we advise them to take before we reconsider their application. Any actions requested will be reasonable and proportionate with an aim to enhance the individual's circumstances so that they may more easily sustain a tenancy.
- 4.12.3 An applicant may request a review of our decisions in relation to their application outcomes. If they wish to request a review by our Support Services & Allocation Manager this should be done within 28 days of notification in line with our CBL policies. If the applicant remains dissatisfied with the appeal decision they can pursue the matter through the Group complaints procedure.
- 4.12.4 Where complaints relate to applications or decisions made by other CBL partners, we cannot respond further and will refer the applicant back to the partner organisation that has either registered the application or made the decision.

4.13 Mutual Exchange

- 4.13.1 Most tenants in social housing have a right to carry out a mutual exchange with another eligible tenant or tenants, and we support and encourage this ability.
- 4.13.2 To enable tenants find an appropriate exchange, there are a number of options available including:
- Access to register for a mutual exchange via our main CBL schemes: Select Move and MyHomeChoiceFyldeCoast

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

- Tenants can choose to access any other mutual exchange scheme if HomeSwap Direct does not cover their area of interest, and we will reimburse membership costs until they find a move if they are actively looking
- Tenants can also choose to privately look for someone to swap with by placing their own personal advert either locally or on appropriate websites/social media.
- We will publicise these options and provide information to all tenants about these services via our website.

4.14 Area specific restrictions

- 4.14.1 Local Lettings Plans (LLPs) can be recommended by the housing manager responsible for the properties to address housing management issues and develop a sustainable community within a defined area. They will lead on internal consultation to establish the scope and extent of the Local Lettings Plan in collaboration with the Support Services & Allocations Manager. A Local Lettings Plan will only then be established following consultation with local residents, local authorities, and key stakeholders such as partner agencies like the police.
- 4.14.2 There must be a clearly identified benefit, for example, high levels of empty properties or severe anti-social behaviour issues.
- 4.14.3 Care must be taken to ensure that such plans are not discriminatory, for example, by applying age restrictions.
- 4.14.4 The LLP should have an agreed review date of a maximum of 12 months for the housing manager to assess how effective it is and if it is still required. Any consideration to change or withdraw the LLP should be communicated back to the same stakeholders involved in the initial consultation and opportunity provided to seek their views before a final decision is made and communicated.
- 4.14.5 Some properties are covered by a Section 106 agreement (that are stored centrally and can be reviewed as and when required) or other agreements, which mean that we are bound to allocate in line with this, for example specific local connection criteria or age restrictions. Where these agreements prevent the prompt allocation of properties, we will negotiate with the local authority to meet current housing needs within the area.

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

4.15 Definitions

- 4.15.1 Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) – choice-based lettings schemes give applicants a choice of which properties they are interested in through a sub-regional or standalone scheme.
- 4.15.2 Equitable tenancy - a tenancy is held in trust for an applicant under 18 years old but allows the minor to occupy the property instead of waiting until they turn 18 years old. A suitable trustee acts as the representative for the tenant until that date.
- 4.15.3 MATB1 form – a form that confirms pregnancy and the expected date of birth.
- 4.15.4 Nominations – an agreement where the local authority can nominate applicants for properties in a scheme, usually for a specified percentage of lets.
- 4.15.5 Section 106 agreement – these agreements relate to conditions as part of the planning process for building new developments other than the physical structure, such as who is eligible for the social housing on the site.

4.16 References

- 4.16.1 Housing Act 2004
- 4.16.2 Homelessness reduction act 2017
- 4.16.3 The Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
- 4.16.4 Armed Forces Act 2006
- 4.16.5 Localism Act 2011
- 4.16.6 Immigration Act 2016 (Right to Rent)
- 4.16.7 Select Move policy – www.selectmove.co.uk/content/information/LeafletsandBooklets
- 4.16.8 My Home Choice policy – www.myhomechoicefyldecoast.co.uk/content/Information
- 4.16.9 The Rent Policy Statement On Rents for Social Housing, published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

4.17 Data Protection

- 4.17.1 This policy has been written in compliance with the principles and requirements of the current data protection legislation, please refer to the Group GDPR Data Protection Policy for more information.

5. Implementation

Progress Housing Group		Housing Operations			
Title:	Allocations Policy				
Ref No:	GRPOLHM09	Reviewed:	March 2019	Version:	4

5.1 **Training** - Staff responsible for the implementation of this policy are trained regularly in relation to any policy or legislative changes which relate to allocating homes.

5.2 **Procedure references:**

- Select Move Policy & Procedures
- MyHomeChoice Consistent Assessment Policy & Procedures

5.3 **Linked documents**

- Allocation of accommodation; guidance for local authorities
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5918/2171391.pdf
- Providing social housing for local people:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269035/131219_circular_for_pdf.pdf

6. Consultation

6.1 Consultation takes place every two to three years for each of our main schemes MyHomeChoice and Select Move, led by partners with applicants, stakeholders, local agencies, and advocates.

6.2 Consultation also takes place with tenants where any review or change is proposed.

7. Review

7.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years as a result of a change in our main housing allocation schemes or legislation.

8. Equality impact assessment

8.1 An Equality Impact assessment was completed in 2021 and it has been assessed that this policy will have a low impact on the nine protected characteristics.