

Allocations Policy



Reference:	Version 2
Scope:	Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes
Legislation:	Housing Acts 1985 Housing Act 88 Housing Act 1996 Localism Act 2011 Welfare Reform Act 2012 Children Act 1989 Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 Data Protection Act 2018
Regulatory/Governance:	Nominations Agreements Regulator of Social Housing Tenancy standard
Related Policies:	Wokingham Borough Council's Allocations strategy Managing voids policy Mutual Exchange policy Tenancy Policy Current arrears recovery policy Succession policy Safeguarding Adults at Risk policy & procedure Safeguarding Children and Young People policy & procedure Anti-social Behaviour Hate Crime and harassment policy Domestic Abuse policy Joint and sole tenancies procedure Decant policy Complaints policy
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Date of review:	September 2023

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy applies to Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes which collectively will be referred to as the Local Housing Companies (the LHC).
- 1.2 The LHC has delegated responsibility to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) for ensuring that this policy is implemented and delivered.

- 1.3 Although WBC has been delegated responsibility, the LHC will be consulted and to sign off the following proposed actions in delivering this policy:
- Nominating an applicant for a property
 - Confirmation that the property is affordable for the applicant
 - The type of tenancy being offered
- 1.4 The purpose of this policy is to issue guidance in relation to the allocation of the LHC's rented housing stock.
- 1.5 This policy has been developed in partnership with WBC and ensures the LHC homes are allocated to new residents in order to ensure that:
- the housing needs of our applicants are met;
 - customer mobility is promoted, and
 - use of our scarce resources are maximised and that properties are allocated in a transparent and equitable way.
- 1.6 WBC has 100% nomination rights for all the LHC's stock when a property becomes empty or after handover of new builds.
- 1.7 Section 5 of this policy outlines the way in which the association operates and manages the letting of empty properties to new customers.
- 1.8 Section 7 below outlines the process for existing residents who wish to transfer to another property.
- 1.9 This policy covers allocations for the following LHC rented housing:
- Social rented and affordable housing;
 - Specialist housing stock (sheltered, extra care and supported housing);
 - Key worker housing;
 - Homes with specific local lettings stipulations;

2 Scope

- 2.1 The LHC aims to provide good quality housing which will be let to those applicants most in need in line with statutory and legal requirements.
- 2.2 The LHC will ensure that vacant dwellings are let to new customers as quickly as possible in a timely manner and to minimise rent loss.
- 2.3 For applicants registered on the housing waiting list nominated by WBC, the LHC aims to:
- empower applicants to exercise choice in both where they live and the type of property in which they want to live in line with their housing need;
 - create a transparent and accountable lettings service that is easily understood by applicants;
 - help create and maintain sustainable and balanced communities;
 - let homes quickly and efficiently, reducing void turnaround time.
- 2.4 For existing residents who have a housing need and wish to transfer, the LHC will signpost them back to WBC to register as being in housing need. The LHC does not maintain a separate transfer waiting list for existing residents. See 1.5 above.

2.5 If a customer is seeking to purchase a home through the shared ownership scheme they will be signposted to register on the Help to Buy South website at: www.helptobuysouth.co.uk

2.5.1 The marketing and conveyancing of Loddon Homes shared ownership properties is managed by Housing Solutions with Loddon Homes input when necessary. Any shared ownership applications that are received for these properties will be approved by WBC's Housing Needs team

2.6 Private owners, leaseholders and shared owners are exempt from this policy.

2.7 To support the operation of this policy, the LHC will:

- ensure staff are fully trained in accordance with this policy;
- ensure that the policy is transparent and accessible to all of our customers;
- allocate homes in accordance with this policy;
- support applicants in applying for a transfer by signposting to WBC as required or signposting them to Home swappers if mutual exchange is a potential option.

3 Definitions

3.1 For those accessing this policy the following definitions apply:

- Nomination: By agreement, to place those in housing need into a home as these become available.
- Allocation: The process of providing a new tenancy to an applicant nominated by WBC (as identified in section 5.2 of this policy).
- Transfer: A request from an existing customer who wishes to move from their current LHC property as their circumstances have changed.
- Applicants: Potential customers who are nominated to the LHC for accommodation
- Key worker: is typically a public sector employee who is considered to provide an essential service or other "essential" workers whose employment supports the local economy.

4 Legislation

4.1 This document makes reference to the legal requirements and policies that must be adhered to. This includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Children Act 1989
- Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
- Data Protection Act 2018

5 New Applicants: Allocation of Nominations Received

5.1 To be eligible for a nomination to a LHC home, an applicant must first register with WBC.

5.2 WBC will assess the individual's application on the basis of housing need according to its Allocations policy (definition and process amended in March 2015) and then advise the individual of the likelihood of being able to house them.

5.3 On receipt of a void property the Voids Coordinator will notify the Housing Needs department at WBC who will, by return, make a nomination from their housing register.

- 5.5 All applicants are required to undergo a financial and right to rent assessment as part of the verification process at the LHC.
- 5.6 The LHC has the right to reject a nomination based on (but not limited to) the following criteria:
- There is insufficient evidence to support an application. (Examples may include, but are not limited to, insufficient information on previous addresses, household members or income, lack of confirmation regarding leave to remain and right to rent);
 - The applicant is an owner-occupier or leaseholder;
 - The applicants' needs do not meet the property type available (for example, the applicant requires particular adaptations to make the property practical which are not already made to the property in question);
 - The applicant holds a current housing association or local authority tenancy.
 - The applicant has previously been evicted by the LHC, or any other private or social landlord, for rent arrears and/or anti-social behaviour.
 - The applicant is in arrears and/or is being investigated for anti-social behaviour with their current landlord.
 - The applicant has former tenant arrears with the LHC.
 - On the completion of a financial assessment the applicant is financially unable to sustain the tenancy (see sections 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 of this policy).

6.0 Offers of Accommodation

- 6.1 Once a nomination has been accepted by the LHC a provisional offer of accommodation will be sent to the applicant.
- 6.2 All offers of accommodation are provisional and subject to the satisfactory verification of the applicant's eligibility, housing need and identity. Checks will also be conducted to ensure that the applicant's housing need matches the property offered. An additional housing assessment will be undertaken for any applicant for sheltered or supported housing to ensure the applicant is suitable for the accommodation and scheme that they have been nominated for.
- 6.3 Offers will also be subject to establishing that the applicant is able to prove their ability to sustain payments of the tenancy rent and other charges.
- 6.4 Where an applicant declines an offer, the Housing Officer will record the reasons why the property is not suitable so that Housing Needs can take these into account in making future nominations for the particular applicant.
- 6.4 The LHC retains the right to withdraw an offer in instances where:
- there is insufficient evidence to support an application;
 - a previous history of tenancy breaches have been identified; or
 - an offered tenancy is likely not to be sustainable or affordable.
 - The applicant's circumstance and/or medical condition/needs render them unsuitable for property they have been nominated for.
- 6.5 Decisions made about not proceeding with an offer will be reviewed by the LHC.
- 6.6 To counter potential fraud the LHC requires that all applicants provide photographic ID at the time of signing up for the tenancy which will be photocopied. Details of the photographic ID and other information that is required at sign-up will be provided to the applicant prior to the sign-up appointment.

- 6.7 All applicants are required to undergo a financial assessment. Where an applicant either already has financial problems, or cannot demonstrate an ability to pay, the LHC may offer support through WBC or signpost the individual to external money advice services.
- 6.8 In exceptional circumstances, the LHC may decide to offer a tenancy where there is not a clear demonstrable means of an applicant covering their necessary outgoings. An example of this may include a young person leaving care where WBC has a duty to accommodate. This decision will be made in partnership with Social Services.
- 6.9 Where an offer is made to such an applicant (as outlined in 6.8), this offer may be dependent on the applicant attending a financial workshop covering budgeting skills where available as provided by external agencies.
- 6.10 The LHC expect all new customers to make their rental payments one week in advance of monies due.

7. Transferring Residents

7.1 This section of the allocations policy applies to existing social rent residents of the LHC who wish to apply for a transfer.

7.2 As stated at 2.4, any resident who wishes to transfer will be signposted to complete the WBC transfer application form at

www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allid

7.3 Any resident who is intending to apply for a transfer, will be advised that they will need to i) keep their rent account up to date and ii) not cause any nuisance or anti-social behaviour for at least 6 months prior to their application for transfer

7.3.1. Any resident who has been accepted on the transfer waiting list must ensure that they continue to i) keep their rent account up to date and ii) not cause any nuisance or anti-social behaviour to maintain the banding awarded.

7.4 To be eligible for inclusion on the transfer list, residents must have a housing priority need or be affected by welfare reform. The following are examples of the types of housing priority need which may be considered by WBC where residents:

- have an urgent health or disability need
- have fewer bedrooms than they need;
- have more bedrooms than they need;
- are part of a separated household;
- have young children under ten years of age who do not have access to a communal play area or a private garden;
- have mobility issues and are living above the ground floor in properties where the features of the property do not enable suitable adaptations;
- are over the age of 55 and wish to be considered for sheltered housing accommodation;
- have a priority need for housing due to acts of anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse or an enduring medical condition.
- have legal full joint custody with equal rights to their children are entitled to register for a transfer to larger accommodation.

8.0 The Appeals Process relating to Allocations

8.1 If an applicant feels dissatisfied with a decision made concerning their nomination they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with WBC's Housing Needs team. This includes when the applicant has been rejected following the financial assessment.

8.2 If the applicant remains dissatisfied following the discussion with the WBC's Housing Needs team they can request a review of the decision.

8.3 Whilst this review/appeal is being considered the applicant must be made aware that the property that was originally available will not be held pending the outcome.

8.4 The applicant's review request should be made in writing within 21 days of the original decision being communicated to the customer. The review request should include reasons why the applicant is appealing against the decision and information they wish to be considered.

8.5 An independent senior officer who was not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal and decide whether to overturn or support the original decision.

8.6 The applicant will be advised of the final decision in writing within 21 days of receipt of the review request.

8.7 If the applicant is still not satisfied with the decision that has been made, they have the right to make a formal complaint (See the LHC's Complaints Policy).

8.8 Any LHC staff wishing to apply for social rented housing will need to make it known to the Board that they intend to do so. Approval will be required from a member of the Board.

9. Equality & Diversity

9.1 The LHC recognise the needs of a diverse population and always acts within the scope of its own Equality and Diversity Policy, the Human Rights Act 1998, and Equalities Act 2010. The LHC work closely with its partners to ensure it has a clear understanding of its resident community with clear regularly updated service user profiles. The LHC will record, analyse and monitor information on ethnicity, vulnerability and disability.

10. Confidentiality

10.1 Under the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Human Rights Act 1998, all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential. This includes:

- anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a resident, client, applicant, staff or board member
- sensitive organisational information.

10.2 The LHC employees will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information where there is a legal basis for processing the information.

11. Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed on a three yearly basis or more frequently in response to changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, good practice or changes in other relevant LHC policies.

12. Performance

12.1 Our performance in relation to the delivery of the services and activities set out in this policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis through our established reporting mechanisms to our associated boards.

13. Appendices

None