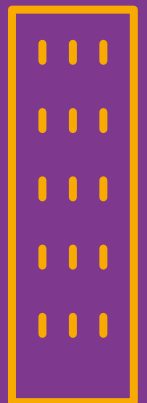




# LETTINGS & POST LETTING HOUSING SUPPORT

## Policy



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# 1.0 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This document is intended to fulfil the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 with regards to the publication of the policies and procedures of a local housing authority in relation to letting vacant homes. It details the guiding principles for those officers in the Council who deal with Lettings are, in-line with the scope below. The aim of the policy is to provide proactive housing support to people to help sustain tenancies and ensure our prospective and new tenants are able to access the support they need to enable them to be tenancy ready.

This document does not say how we will deal with Lettings on a day-to-day basis: this is covered in our **Procedures** document.

## 1.1 IN SCOPE

The process for letting properties, following the successful shortlisting and offer of properties. This includes:

- **Pre-tenancy Workshops:**
  - To prepare prospective tenants to be tenancy ready
- **Lettings Interview:**
  - Signing the tenancy agreement (Including pre-letting and letting)
  - Landlords' and tenants' responsibilities
  - Income maximisation
  - Identifying and agreeing support needs
- **Post-Letting Housing Support:**
  - Up to 12 weeks from Tenancy Start Date
  - 6 months for Care Leavers under 25 years for introductory tenancies

The Council's social housing stock, whether the letting is through the housing register or via other means deemed appropriate to ensure the best use of the Council's stock.

## 1.2 OUT OF SCOPE

- The process of shortlisting applicants for properties including viewing the property
- Allocation of properties, this is covered under the Allocation Scheme (Jan 2023). The Allocation Scheme details eligibility and qualification to join the Council's housing register, the priority awarded to households on the housing register dependent on their assessed housing need, the Council's criteria for determining the types of properties households are eligible for and the way in which properties are allocated (Either via bids placed by applicants or on their behalf, or through other lettings mechanisms determined by the Council).
- Temporary accommodation.
- The standard and condition of properties at the time of letting – these are covered by the Council's Empty Property Repairs Standard.

## 2.0 CONTEXT

The Council owns and manages a significant housing stock, in excess of 59,000 homes. This stock is located in a relatively large geographical area of over 103 square miles throughout Birmingham and is of various property types, sizes and tenures.

This policy applies to all of the Council's social housing stock (Excluding temporary accommodation), whether let through the housing register or via other means deemed appropriate to ensure the best use of the Council's stock.

As outlined above, this policy applies only to the process for letting properties, following the successful shortlisting and offer of properties via the Allocation Scheme. At the point that an applicant is successfully shortlisted for an offer of accommodation, the Lettings Team will also be made aware of any relevant information, such as translation requirements, vulnerabilities etc., in order that appropriate arrangements can be made for the tenant to view the property, attend a pre-tenancy workshop and any subsequent appointments relevant to the letting.

The Lettings process is delivered via three specific functions. The purpose of these functions is to provide incoming tenants with relevant advice at the correct stage of the process. The aim is to assist new tenants to set up and sustain their tenancies by providing customer centred support tailored to their individual needs and requirements.

- Pre-Tenancy Workshop
- Letting Interview
- Post-Letting Housing Support

The Council issues the tenancies outlined in Table 1.

Introductory Tenancies	Introductory Tenancies are issued to tenants new to the Council, or where a new tenant is succeeding to a secure tenancy where it is considered appropriate for tenancy sustainment to provide support for the initial 12-month period. Where introductory tenancies are issued this will be reviewed after 12 months and the tenant will transition to a secure tenancy, providing that the tenancy has been managed in accordance with the Conditions of Tenancy. Where there is concern regarding the tenant's compliance with the Conditions of Tenancy, the Council may decide to extend the introductory period for a further 12 months to allow time for the tenant to be supported to remedy any tenancy breaches. Any decision to extend the term of an introductory tenancy can be reviewed by the tenant. During the introductory period, tenants have reduced rights including no right to buy the property, no right to participate in a Mutual Exchange and no right to make major changes to the property.
Secure Tenancies	Secure Tenancies are issued at the beginning of a tenancy only where the tenant is transferring from another Council property as a secure tenant or where they are part of a mutual exchange with equivalent tenancy status. Tenants succeeding to a tenancy that is already secure will also be issued with a secure tenancy unless the Council considers that there are reasons to issue an introductory tenancy. The Council will not grant fixed-term tenancies within Council-owned and managed stock.
Alderson Trust Tenancies	Alderson Trust Tenancies are issued to ex-service military personnel. These properties are reserved for former members of the Armed Forces and will remain as introductory tenancies for the duration of the tenancy. Tenants residing in these properties have reduced tenancy rights, including no right to buy.
Tenant Management Organisations (TMO's)	A tenant management organisation (TMO) is an organisation set up under the UK Government's (Right to Manage) Regulations 1994, which allows residents of Council or Housing Association homes in the UK to take over responsibility for the management of their homes. The tenancy types for residents of TMO schemes are introductory and secure, in line with the Council's tenancy types of the same nature.
Fixed Term Tenancies	The Council does not operate a policy of using fixed-term tenancies for general offers of accommodation via stock owned and managed by the Council. In some very limited cases the Council may use properties which have a fixed-term tenancy due to the nature of the property ownership being via a lease arrangement. In these cases, a five-year fixed term tenancy will usually be issued in accordance with the terms of the Council's lease. As the Council operates a choice-based lettings scheme, prospective tenants will be advised in advance of the fact that the property has a fixed-term tenancy and of the duration of the fixed-term, prior to expressing an interest in the property.

The relevant tenure type will always be detailed in the property advertisement for the Council's choice-based letting scheme. Applicants with vulnerabilities (such as age, illness or disability) will have these recognised via the Allocations Policy and will be eligible to express an interest in properties that meet their specific medical or mobility needs, or age-appropriate accommodation.

## 3.0 PRE-TENANCY WORKSHOPS

As soon as possible after an applicant has been shortlisted for an offer of accommodation, they will be invited to a non-mandatory Pre-Tenancy Workshop. These workshops are designed to prepare prospective tenants to be tenancy ready by making them aware of their obligations as tenants and giving realistic advice around the likely condition of the property at the time of the letting and the first steps tenants will need to take on occupation. In addition, incoming tenants will be advised of the general timescales of the Letting process and of their new tenancy starting. The groups may be tailored to particular participants, for example there may be a specific group for Care Leavers.

The aim is for these workshops to take place prior to the viewing and/or letting appointment wherever possible, however this may not always be possible where, for example, properties are immediately available for occupation or there is an urgent need for the tenant to move in. Where a tenant is unable to attend a workshop, or chooses not to do so, the officer conducting the Letting Interview will ensure that the relevant topics are discussed with the tenant.

The Pre-tenancy Workshops cover general advice relating the following topics (this list is not exhaustive):

- Conditions of Tenancy
- Health and Safety
- Rent
- Affordability

## 4.0 LETTING INTERVIEW

Prospective tenants will be invited to a Letting appointment to complete their tenancy sign-up during which the Tenancy Agreement and Conditions of Tenancy will be issued and the tenant will receive the keys for their new home.

All new tenants are required to provide proof of identification and immigration status, in accordance with the UK Right to Rent checks. To support the specific needs of tenants, the Council provides varying levels of support for the Letting Interview including home/hospital visits, face to face lettings and interpreting services where required. These additional support needs will be identified with the tenant at the property viewing and the appropriate arrangements made to ensure that the tenant is able to participate in and understand the lettings process.

Customer and property specific advice and guidance will be provided to all incoming tenants to support them to settle into their new home and to help them to independently sustain their tenancy. The advice and support provided during the Letting Interview includes (this list is not exhaustive):

- Rent and Payment Options
- Benefit Advice
- Fire Safety
- Income Maximisation
- Budgeting and Affordability

During the Letting Interview the Council will, with the tenant, determine the appropriate level of support needed, the duration of the support to be provided, and whether any referrals to other agencies may be relevant to assist the tenant in settling into their tenancy and ensuring tenancy sustainability. Where it is identified that tenants require a significant level of support, specific teams are in place to provide this support and tenants will be referred to the most appropriate team to ensure that support is in place.

## 5.0 POST LETTING HOUSING SUPPORT

The aim of the post letting housing support is to support tenants to succeed in their tenancies by providing proactive tailored housing support to new tenants who are not receiving support from other sources. The support offered is tailored to the needs of the tenant to enable them to manage and sustain their tenancy. Those tenants who are identified as requiring little or no support will be contacted during the first 12 weeks to resolve any issues that may have arisen. Those tenants who are identified as requiring additional support, for instance former rough sleepers, will be provided with the appropriate service, either for up to 12 weeks from their tenancy start date, or for 6 months for Care Leavers under the age of 25 who are introductory tenants.

Advice and guidance will be given at all stages to enable the tenant to sustain the tenancy by ensuring that the tenant is aware of how to access support and relevant services, and that they are confident in managing their tenancy at the end of the support period. The support provided includes:

- **Settling In:** Advice and guidance provided to help the tenant with settling into the property, such as ensuring utilities are set up, resolving issues such as completion of gas safety test, ensuring that furniture and essential household items are in place, relevant charitable applications are completed, repairs are reported and resolving initial snagging issues. Advice and guidance will also be offered to resolve any further property or tenancy issues to enable the tenant to manage their home including referrals for adaptations and applications to charities.
- **Affordability:** Advice and guidance offered with identifying and claiming additional welfare benefits, income maximisation and financial inclusion, budgeting and debt advice, crisis support and managing the rent account.
- **Aftercare Support:** For transitioning from the 12-week support where further vulnerabilities are identified, tenants will be signposted and referrals made to appropriate organisations and external agencies for additional or ongoing support, such as mental health, domestic abuse, and family support.

The service will also work with other areas of housing services as necessary including referrals relating to fraud, or with our Tenancy and Estate Management teams for abandoned properties, breaches of tenancy, or for antisocial behaviour, domestic abuse or other specific support needs where services are in place.

## 5.1 EXTRA CARE ACCOMMODATION

Due to the age and vulnerabilities of tenants eligible for Extra Care accommodation, lettings and post letting support are managed directly by the Extra Care service. Once a prospective tenant is matched to a property, a viewing is conducted with staff from the Extra Care Service. A sign-up appointment is then arranged with the tenant at the relevant scheme, or an alternative location (such as hospital) where required.

The on-site Extra Care staff carry out a weekly visit to the tenant throughout the duration of the tenancy. During these visits, support will be provided to the tenant around relevant tenancy issues (debt/financial/benefits, care and support needs etc.). These visits also provide an opportunity to check the condition of the property, report any required repairs and identify any changes in the tenant's circumstances or ability to manage their tenancy where further support may need to be provided. Where specific support needs are identified, referrals are made to appropriate organisations with the agreement of the tenant.



## 5.2 SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION (“CAT 2”)

The Council operates a number of “Cat 2” sheltered housing schemes throughout the city. “Cat 2” schemes are corridor-linked housing schemes for tenants with specific support needs. For these schemes, viewing and lettings are carried out by the local Voids and Lettings Team as with general needs accommodation, and the relevant support path is followed depending on the tenant’s needs as identified during the lettings process. Once the tenant takes up occupation of the accommodation, the on-site support staff carry out weekly visits throughout the duration of the tenancy.

During these visits, support will be provided to the tenant around relevant tenancy issues (debt/financial/benefits, care and support needs etc.). These visits also provide an opportunity to check the condition of the property, report any required repairs and identify any changes in the tenant’s circumstances or ability to manage their tenancy where further support may need to be provided. Where specific support needs are identified, referrals are made to appropriate organisations with the agreement of the tenant.

### **Sheltered Accommodation (“Cat 1”)**

The Council also operates a number of “Cat 1” sheltered housing schemes throughout the city, for tenants with lesser support needs. “Cat 1” schemes are non-corridor linked (such as high-rise or low-level) accommodation. For these schemes, viewings and lettings are carried out by the Local Housing Team as with general needs accommodation. For those tenants where a need for support is identified, a referral is made to the floating support service to provide support for an initial 12-week period around tenancy related issues. There is no limit to the number of 12-week tenancy support periods that may be provided throughout the lifetime of a tenancy. All tenants also receive an annual review of their support needs during the duration of the tenancy. Where it is identified during a 12-month review or due to the number of 12-weekly support periods required that the tenant may require a higher level of support, floating support officers will consider, with the tenant’s agreement, a referral for “Cat 2” accommodation.

## 6.0 MOVING ON

The Council acknowledges that tenants may decide that their home is no longer suitable for them, and may wish to move on to accommodation elsewhere in Birmingham or further, depending on their circumstances. The Council will assist tenants in these circumstances through various means, outlined below:

- Housing register
- Mutual exchange
- Wisemove

### 6.1 HOUSING REGISTER

Tenants may re-join the housing register and seek a home elsewhere in Birmingham by way of a transfer. There are various reasons why this may be the case, and the Allocation Scheme affords that relevant priority status will be given to households seeking to downsize, or where the household has grown beyond the size that the property can realistically accommodate. Transfer applications will be handled in the same way as applications from non-tenants, with applicants placing bids for properties more suitable for their needs.

### 6.2 MUTUAL EXCHANGE

Where tenants wish to exchange for a home in a different part of the city or the UK (managed by a Registered Provider or Local Authority), they may seek a mutual exchange through their own means, or via the [Homeswapper](#) website, where properties are advertised nationally.

### 6.3 WISEMOVE

The Council's [Wisemove](#) service assists tenants seeking to downsize from their current home to another property in Birmingham. This service provides assistance with moving, setting up utilities, decorating and making minor accessibility adaptations where required.

## 7.0 THE COUNCIL'S PRINCIPLES

The Council values and behaviours are:

- We put citizens first.
- We are empathetic and respectful in everything we do.
- We are true to our word.
- When we make promises we keep them.
- We act courageously.
- We lead, we manage and we tackle the difficult issues: everyday, every one of us.
- We achieve excellence.
- We get things right. First time every time.

The Council applies the following principles to the management of lettings:

### 7.1 WE ENSURE THAT LETTINGS AND THE LETTING HOUSING SUPPORT ARE CARRIED OUT IN A FAIR, TRANSPARENT AND EFFICIENT WAY, BY:

- Prioritising support to the most vulnerable people, based on the specific needs of the tenant, taking any necessary early action to protect residents and property.
- Ensuring residents are fairly treated, without discrimination on any grounds including those identified as protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, or any other unjustifiable criteria.
- Being proactive when contacting and supporting tenants, providing early interventions and mitigate any issues quickly and efficiently to prevent any further escalation.

### 7.2 WE DELIVER OUR SERVICES IN AN INCLUSIVE MANNER, BY:

- Recognising the diverse nature of Birmingham as a local authority area. Many new tenants will not have English as a first language and may require additional support in understanding their obligations as a tenant, the expectations they can have of the Council as a landlord and the sometimes complex nature of registering with the relevant providers for utilities, Council Tax etc. and in understanding and acting on correspondence from the Council or other agencies. In order to support tenants with these additional needs the Council will use in-house interpreters and translation services, or such other services as the tenant feels comfortable with (community groups etc.) to ensure that all relevant information is understood.
- Similarly, there will be households where learning difficulties or other barriers mean that tenants need an enhanced level of support in order to set up and maintain their tenancy. The purpose of the Council's existing process is to identify such issues at the earliest opportunity and ensure that tenants are provided with the appropriate level of support and assistance, either by way of their designated Housing Officer or with enhanced support from a specialist provider, to ensure that they are able to understand and exercise their rights as tenants and receive the level of support commensurate with their needs.
- Ensuring that staff members are aware of their responsibilities and roles in safeguarding vulnerable people, commitment to multi-agency working and tailoring approaches in line with best practice.

## **7.3 WE ENSURE THAT THE COUNCIL IS ACTING AS A LANDLORD IN A LEGALLY COMPLIANT MANNER, BY:**

- Complying with the Housing Act 1996 Part 6 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Localism Act 2011, whereby the Council is required to have a housing allocation scheme. The Act also sets out the legal framework by which it is bound.
- Ensuring, the Council will only ask for information that they need to support tenants with the letting process. The partner organisations will collect and keep data in accordance with GDPR and the Council's guidelines on handling personal, sensitive personal or special categories of personal data. Tenants can find out how the Council hold and use information about them on the Council's Website. These guidelines are in accordance with the national regulations which cover both electronic and manual records and the govern everything we do with the data, including collecting, storing, using and disposing of it.
- Ensuring that personal, sensitive personal or special categories of personal data held about applicants will not be disclosed to third parties apart from:
  - Where the individual who is the subject of the confidential information has consented to the disclosure.
  - Where disclosure is made in accordance with an information sharing protocol that complies with the ICO's current data sharing code of practice.
  - Where the Council or a partner organisation is required by law to make such disclosures.
- Ensuring that the allocation and lettings process supports the Council's wider strategic objectives and statutory duties.

## **7.4 WE CONTRIBUTE TO THE EFFECTIVE LETTING OF THE COUNCIL'S HOMES AND THE SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES, BY:**

- Using data-driven approaches in ensuring a high-quality service.
- Regularly reviews and assessments to ensure the needs of tenants and landlords are met.
- Acting on any negative feedback to improve our service when appropriate.
- Taking an impartial and tailored approach to supporting people, to ensure that tenancies can be in place as quickly as possible and sustained where possible.
- Working collaboratively with focus groups, to inform service improvements and ensure a high-quality service is provided.
- Working in partnership with services such as Birmingham Children's Trust in relation to Care Leavers.
- Linking with departments and agencies to share appropriate information to secure and sustain tenancies where needed, such as Antisocial Behaviour Department.
- Embedding opportunities for tenants to be involved in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods and to provide feedback to the Council following lettings, repairs etc.