



TITLE	Lettings Management Policy
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Lead officer(s) & Author:	Simon Brooke
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This Policy relates to the letting and re-letting of homes owned or managed by WM Housing Group and its partner housing associations.

1.0 Policy Statement

1.1 WM Housing Group is committed to the following objectives in lettings its properties:

- To let properties quickly, minimising the number of empty properties and maximising rent income.
- To let homes giving customers as much choice as possible, with the aim of housing customers where they want to live and therefore increasing customer satisfaction.
- To ensure the effective utilisation of our stock.
- To enable access to appropriate accommodation to those in greatest need of housing.
- To work with local authorities and other partners to meet housing needs, improve customer care and help meet statutory duties.
- To contribute to creating and maintaining sustainable communities.
- To ensure services are responsive to the diverse needs of the communities that we work within, ensuring equal opportunities to all applicants for housing.
- To provide good quality homes to a good lettable standard.

2.0 Policy Purpose and Aims:

2.1 This policy provides a framework within which our partner Associations (Whitefriars Housing Group, Harden Housing Association, Kemble Housing, and Nexus Housing) will implement, operate and monitor procedures for the letting of properties.

The policy seeks to contribute to the Group's vision "Creating places where people are PROUD to live and work". This policy seeks to effect this by ensuring customers have a choice of properties and areas to select from, in order to maximise customer satisfaction with their home and the community they move into.

2.2 WM Housing Group has four core values. This policy provides a framework for the delivery of these via our letting services. Our staff will work within the policy framework and our values when completing their work.

Our core values are:

- Providing excellent services
- Acting with integrity
- Delivering creative solutions
- Valuing people

2.3 This policy meets the requirements of the Government's regulation of all Registered Social Landlords as prescribed in the Housing Act 1996 and laid down in the Tenant Services Authority's Regulatory Code. Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 are particularly relevant. In summary these require housing associations to manage homes that seek to meet people's needs and preferences; ensuring that homes are well maintained and in a lettable condition; that we provide good quality services with a choice of home giving reasonable preference to those in housing need; and are working with local authorities to enable them to meet their statutory responsibilities.

Regulatory Guidance further specifies that housing associations should shape their services around the needs of customers; that lettings policies are flexible and non-discriminatory; that housing associations cooperate with local authorities; and that applicants only be excluded for serious unacceptable behaviour.

2.4 The Government require all local authorities to implement a "choice based lettings" system by 2010. WM Housing Group and its partner housing associations are committed wherever possible to work with local authorities to ensure "choice based lettings" are available in communities in which we operate. In negotiating with local authorities and other partners we will look to agree common priority systems and common waiting lists where these meet the aims and objectives of this policy.

2.5 Our lettings services will also work within other Group policies, particularly relevant are our Equality and Diversity Policy, Customer Care Policy and our Data Protection Policy.

3.0 Our Policy

3.1 Policy Framework

WM Housing Group through its partner housing associations works in many communities. We believe it is important to allow flexibility to help address housing needs in each community. Therefore each of our partner housing associations will have an agreed "Lettings statement" and procedures for letting its properties in line with this policy.

These statements should be agreed by the Boards of the respective partner housing associations. The statement should include a broad outline of how each partner housing association will let its homes. These will be made available to customers, to ensure openness and accountability.

Lettings statements should include arrangements for applying for accommodation, nominations agreements with any local authorities, priority systems and eligibility requirements for size and type of accommodation.

3.2 Local letting plans

WM Housing Group is committed to ensuring its lettings contribute to creating or maintaining stable and sustainable communities. Where appropriate additional lettings rules will be adopted and form a local lettings plan. Local lettings plans will be available for potential customers to see, to ensure openness and accountability.

Local lettings plans should be approved by the Board of the partner housing association or as delegated by its Board and stated in its "Lettings Statement". Implementation of local lettings plans should follow consultation with the relevant local authority and local residents.

3.3 Working together with local authorities

We are committed to working in partnership with local authorities and other partners to improve services, provide good customer care and maximise customer choice. Each partner housing association will have responsibility for building and maintaining partnerships with local authorities and others. This may involve the development of common waiting lists or priority systems. When negotiating schemes partner housing associations should ensure that the scheme enables the Association to comply with the aims of this policy and the Tenant Services Authority's Regulatory Code. The Board of the partner association may approve schemes on behalf of the Group.

We are committed to assisting local authorities to meet their statutory duties. We are particularly mindful of assisting them in providing accommodation advice and support to homeless people. We will develop and maintain homelessness action plans to coordinate our actions in this area.

3.4 Tenancy agreements

It is our policy to provide our tenants with an Assured Tenancy in line with the guidance contained in the Regulatory Code. As part of our approach to the management and prevention of anti social behaviour, partner housing association boards will set out how and when we will use starter tenancies for the first 12 months of occupation. These starter tenancies will be Assured Shorthold Tenancies and will convert to Assured Tenancies at the end of 12 months, as long as no action has commenced to terminate the tenancy. We will also make use of Assured Shorthold tenancies for any Intermediate Market Rent (IMR) properties.

The use of Assured Shorthold Tenancies will be closely monitored and subject to a review every 3 years.

For non self contained accommodation such as hostel accommodation, customers will be offered a contractual licence.

3.5 Transfers

WM Housing Group and its partner housing associations are committed to ensure our customers

who wish to move are given good advice on the options available for transfer and mutual exchange as well as shared ownership.

Customers of WM Housing Group or other social landlords will only be considered for an offer of alternative accommodation where they have:

- No outstanding rent, court costs or rechargeable debts
- Maintained the property in good condition
- Complied with the terms of their tenancy

3.6 Emergency transfers

In emergencies there may be a need to provide immediate re-housing and it may not be possible to re-house the person/family within our normal arrangements.

Emergency transfers will be considered where there are circumstances that threaten the life or would seriously affect the safety of the tenant or other household members to remain in the property. We will work with partner organisations i.e. the police, social services etc to confirm the circumstances and severity of the situation and to ensure our decisions are effective. This can only be facilitated when alternative accommodation is available, if not the customer should be referred to the relevant local authority's homeless department.

Emergency transfers will be sanctioned by relevant managers as agreed in partner housing association procedures.

3.7 Mutual exchange

WM Housing Group and its partner housing associations will encourage and support customers who wish to pursue a mutual exchange. Secure and Assured tenants of the partners associations have a right to exchange their tenancy with another tenant subject to written consent of the association.

3.8 Restricted access to housing

WM Housing Group will not normally accept the following applicants for housing:

- Applicants under 18 years of age, except in specialist accommodation schemes where effective support is in place.
- Applicants subject to immigration control or a person from abroad unless they are a qualifying person.
- Applicants or members of their family who have caused serious anti social behaviour.
- Applicants with outstanding debts to WM Housing Group or a partner housing association or to another RSL or Local Authority as a result of failure to pay rent, court costs, rechargeable repairs or any other debt. Partner housing associations will each have their own arrangements to provide flexibility where debts are being paid off in accordance with an agreement or to assist the local authority meet their statutory obligations with regard to homelessness.
- Existing tenants of WMHG partner housing associations where we have inspected the current property and the condition is not to acceptable standards.

- Applicants who cannot demonstrate that they can sustain a tenancy either because they cannot afford to pay the rent or they need a high level of support which cannot be facilitated by us or another provider.
- Where partner housing associations have charitable status, lettings will be consistent with the requirement regarding 'necessitous circumstances'.
- Owner occupiers / leaseholders except where housing needs are not being met and their financial position means that alternative accommodation in the private sector is unavailable.

Flexibility regarding these restrictions will be considered for exceptional cases. These must be agreed by the relevant Assistant Director or Head of Service.

3.9 Decants

WM Housing Group is involved in a number of schemes to redevelop communities and these sometimes entail the re-housing of existing tenants and demolition or refurbishment of the property. We are committed to ensuring that customers affected by such schemes are offered re-housing that is fair and timely to ensure schemes are not delayed.

Partner housing associations will include in their statement and procedures, arrangements for the housing of decants. This will include statutory and discretionary compensation payments.

We will work with partners to ensure decants are properly prioritised in any common letting arrangements. At the same time we may provide direct offers to affect a move where this is necessary.

3.10 Employees & board members

Staff, board members and their relatives may be offered accommodation providing their application is treated in a scrupulously fair way against other applications for housing. Employees, board members or their relatives must declare their interest when they apply for housing, so that their application can be monitored and treated fairly.

Upon housing by a partner housing association; employees, Board members or close relatives must register their interest as per Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996.

For the purpose of this policy relatives includes spouses or partners, parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren and brothers and sisters. This policy also applies to someone who has a relationship with a Board member or employee, such that, there is a risk any decision taken by the Board member or employee could be influenced.

These rules also apply to former employees and Board Members for a period of 12 months after they leave their post.

3.11 False information

The partners in the Group will take action for possession of a property if it is later deemed that an applicant has knowingly or recklessly provided false information which resulted in the allocation of a property they would have otherwise have not be entitled to.

3.12 Supported housing and special services

WM Housing Group and its partner housing associations are committed to provide accommodation and related support services to vulnerable groups. Some vulnerable customers find difficulty in finding suitable secure accommodation and where we can, we will try to assist.

Partner housing associations may agree schemes with supported housing providers to provide direct access to accommodation. Any such schemes should be approved by the Board of the partner housing association or as delegated by its Board and stated in its "Lettings Statement". Approval should follow consultation with the relevant Local Authority and any customers effected.

All supported housing schemes will be in support of the aims and objectives as outlined in this policy.

3.13 Management of vacant properties

WM Housing Group and its partner housing associations are committed to letting our vacant properties quickly. Our aim is to minimise rent loss, keep the number of vacant properties as low as possible and thereby maximise the availability of housing to meet housing needs.

We will repair our vacant properties in accordance with an agreed lettable standard. We will regularly review our standards in consultation with our customers.

We will manage the re-letting process in accordance with agreed procedures.

3.14 Customer involvement

WM Housing group recognise the importance of working closely with customers to ensure our services are responsive to the needs of our customers.

Each partner housing association will continue to seek customer feedback and involve customers in improving our letting service to meet the needs of the communities that we are working in.

This policy has been developed with our customers following discussions in customer service groups.

4.0 Equality Impact Assessment

4.1 This policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. Our staff have considered the impact of this policy on different sections of our communities. We have sought to ensure in framing this policy, that we will not discriminate adversely against any group and will respect the diversity of the communities we are working within.

We will ensure that our services reflect the diverse communities that we work with. We will not discriminate on grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender or age.

4.2 We will be aware of other factors in delivering services so that where a person suffers with poor

mental health, has limited literacy skills or other vulnerability we can deliver services that that are sensitive to these issues.

WM Housing Group carry out Equality Impact Assessments to understand the impact that our policies have on groups of people or individuals. These impacts may be positive or negative. We have reviewed our policy with employees from within this area of the business and with our customer panels to ensure this policy helps deliver services that meets the diverse needs of people in communities that we serve.

5.0 Performance Measures and Targets

- 5.1 We will set targets and provide regular reports on performance to the partner housing association boards and annually to the Group board.

Reports will include Key Performance Indicators including the % of vacant properties as a proportion of the housing stock and the average turnaround times. These will be reported at each board meeting of the relevant partner housing association.

We will also closely monitor equal opportunities. This will include the proportion of lettings to Black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, disabled people and by gender.

6.0 Monitoring and Review

- 6.1 Annual reports will be received to each partner Board accounting for our letting service. This will include a breakdown of our lettings, our activities over the year, and our performance.
- 6.2 WM Housing Group aims for continuous improvement in its letting service. We use advice and guidance from the Audit Commission amongst other tools to compare and review our service. We will use the Audit Commission's 'Key Lines of Enquiry' (KLOE) to ensure our services are responsive to customers and are good value for money. KLOEs are a set of questions that provide the Commission with a consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of a service, when they are carrying out an inspection.
- 6.3 This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless legislation or sector developments require otherwise, ensuring that it continues to meet its objectives and takes account of good practice developments.

We will consult with our customers on any review of this policy.

7.0 Responsibility

- 7.1 The effective implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Executive Director of Housing.

8.0 Associated Documents/Policies

- 8.1 Tenant Services Authority – regulatory Code and Guidance



Customer Care Policy
Equality & Diversity Policy
Data Protection Policy
Customer Involvement Policy
Homelessness Action Plans
"Lettings statements" of partner housing associations
Local Authority lettings policies where we have nomination arrangements or agreements to operate 'choice based lettings'
Lettings procedures
Housing Corporation Good Practice Note "Tenure" November 2007.