

LETTINGS POLICY

Purpose

This Policy sets out how Black Country Housing Group Limited (the Group) will let its properties.

Policy statement

The Group manages 2000 homes located throughout Sandwell and Dudley and in smaller pockets in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Birmingham. We recognise that to provide a quality housing service we need to let our homes fairly, speedily and responsibly to ensure that these valuable resources are used appropriately.

In producing and operating this Policy, we are committed to making sure that no-one who applies to us for housing is treated less favourably than anyone else because of their race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, disability, sexuality or age. We aim to achieve a balance between offering properties to people who have the greatest need, whilst making the best use of the limited properties that become available.

Related or relevant policy/procedure and other documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

Aids and Adaptation Policy – For those needing adaptations or specialist property to accommodate their needs

Complaints and Compliments Procedure – In the event of an applicant being dissatisfied with the service provided

Data Protection and Retention Policy

Diversity Policy

Restricting access to Housing Policy

Risk Policy

Responsibilities

Overseeing the implementation of this Policy will be the Head of Property Services. Implementation will be by the Lettings Manager and designated staff within the Property Services Team. The responsibility for reviewing and updating rests with the Lettings Manager and Property Services Manager.

Access to Housing

The Group, with the support of our Local Authority partners and the Homes and Communities Agency, regularly build or purchase new properties. It is a condition of the grant funding that these new homes will be let via the relevant Local Authority and that there after at least 50% of all re-lets will be also be let through the 'choice based' lettings schemes operated by these partners.

Of the re-lets we will to allocate 70% of the remaining vacancies to direct applicants on the Group's waiting lists who have significant housing need and our existing tenants who require a transfer to assist with under occupation, over crowding and medical situations. The

remaining re-lets will be made to applicants on our waiting list will lower levels of need which are considered aspirational moves.

Access through our own waiting lists

We consider housing enquiries in the first instance via our online application system however to ensure accessibility we will also accept enquires in writing, by telephone, email or in person at the office from all groups of the community.

Accessing housing need

The housing need of an applicant will be assessed and they will be placed in one of three bands. Band one, for those who have urgent and greatest priority, band two, for those who need to move in the near future and band three, for those who have aspirations to move.

An applicant's position is determined by the allocated points within the band; we will also take into consideration the date registered.

Reviews

Applicants will be placed on our waiting list for 6 months. An applicant must inform us within this timescale whether they wish to remain on the waiting list, failure to do so will see the application cancelled. Regular checks are made and those waiting over two years are contacted to discuss their situation and asked if they wish to remain.

Our criteria for housing

In order to join the Group's waiting list or to be let a property as a result of being nominated by one of our Local Authority partners, applicants must:

- Be at least 18 years of age (or the primary applicant must). NB: (The letting policy relating to the Group rules cover lettings within the Group's two Young Persons Projects and allow for tenancies to start at 16 years of age);
- Be in need of housing or have aspirations to have own home;
- Be in need of the specific adaptations to the property (where applicable);
- Provide clear references in relation to conduct of current and any former tenancies;
- Demonstrate that they are capable of managing and living independently or to do so with 'support';
- Demonstrate that they are able to afford to maintain a tenancy and have sufficient funds to run the home (proof of entitlement to welfare benefits or salary must be provided along with bank statements).
- To have, and provide proof off indefinite leave to remain in the UK or EU citizenship;
- Demonstrate reasonable conduct when dealing with BCHG staff and its contractors.

We reserve the right not to house particular individuals or households.

- Any history of rent arrears (including Court Costs, sundry debts and Housing Benefit over payments);
- Any neighbour nuisance, anti social behaviour, damage to property or other behaviour by the applicant(s) or a member of their household, whether or not a tenant at the time;
- Failure to support any of the points within our criteria for housing;
- Failure to maintain current property in a reasonable condition.

Further details can be found within the Restricting Access to Housing Policy on the Group's website.

As a result of this assessment applications may be accepted onto the waiting list, excluded from the waiting list or deferred until suitability can be demonstrated.

What kind of home will be offered?

We want to make the best use of our properties while seeking to balance the needs of existing tenants. At times we may need to reduce the number of children at a particular location and therefore we may under-occupy properties. We will ensure that prospective tenants are aware of the potential consequences of under-occupation if they are in receipt of benefits. We will as far as possible apply the following eligibility criteria:

Property type	Household size
One bedroom flat	An adult Childless couple
Two bedroom flat	A single adult or 2 single adults Adult(s) with older child Childless couple
Two bedroom house	Childless couple Parent(s) with 1 or 2 children
Three bedroom house	Parent(s) with 2 or 3 children
Four bedroom house	Parent(s) with 3 or 4 children
Five/six bedroom house	Parent(s) with 5 or 6 children

Properties with significant adaptations are allocated to those in need of the adaptations and household size will be dependent on individual circumstances.

Pre-offer & References

When an application is registered with us we will ensure appropriate checks are undertaken regarding the conduct of any previous tenancies. We will also require proof of documents that confirm an applicant's identity, immigration status and entitlement to benefit. As and when circumstances dictate, a visit to the applicant's current home may be undertaken.

During the pre-offer stages we will take a photograph of both main and joint tenants which

will be kept within our electronic filing system this will assist to combat tenancy fraud.

Form of tenancy

The type of tenancy will be dependent on the type of property offered and the circumstances of the prospective tenant.

Type of property/ tenant circumstances	Type of tenancy offered
Property built as part of the Affordable Homes programme to applicants aged between 18 and 60	Affordable Fixed Term 6 year Tenancy, with a initial 12 probationary period
Properties converted at re-let stage to affordable rents let to applicants aged between 18 and 60	Affordable Fixed Term 6 year Tenancy, with a initial 12 probationary period
Property built for social rent to applicants aged between 18 and 60	Social Fixed Term 6 year Tenancy, with a initial 12 probationary period
Re-let general needs property to applicants aged between 18 and 60	Social Fixed Term 6 year Tenancy, with a initial 12 probationary period
Housing to applicants over the age of 61	Assured Tenancy, with a initial 12 probationary period
BCHG tenants transferring	Current tenancy type transfers with tenant
Mutually exchanging tenants	Take on the tenancy type of outgoing tenant

Tenancies let on a fixed term basis will be reviewed 6 months prior to the end of the tenancy at which time the individual circumstance of the tenants will be assessed.

This could result in a new 5 year fixed term tenancy being given or in other circumstances in the tenancy being terminated.

We reserve the right to end the tenancy during the probationary period and at the end of the 5 year period for the following reasons:

- The income levels have increased and the tenant would be able to purchase a property of your own on the open market;
- The household has decreased in size and the tenant you need a smaller home – we may be able to assist them to find something smaller in this case;
- Any breaches of tenancy conditions (we reserve the right to apply for possession without the fixed term tenancy in these conditions);
- Legal action has already started due to a tenancy breach.

Conflict of interest

All applicants are required to declare if they are known to a member of staff or member of the board of management and must declare this on their application for housing.

Failure to do so may result in the application being denied or if this comes to light after a property is let legal action being undertaken to recover the property.

Data protection and retention

We recognise that applicants entrust us with personal and sometimes sensitive information. We undertake to treat this with care and respect, and in particular, we will maintain our records in the strictest of confidence by conforming to the Data Protection Act 1998. In order to obtain references we obtain the applicants permission. Upon agreeing to the terms outlined within our online application or if using a paper application in signing the Group's Housing Application form the applicant grants the Group this permission and also agrees that the Group can keep the information obtained on our computerised records.

Complaints/Compliments and appeals

The Group seeks to provide a high quality and accessible service and feedback from service users is particularly welcome. For complaints and compliments we have a Complaints/Compliments policy and supporting procedure available. Details of this are available from the Group's head office, 134 High Street, Blackheath, West Midlands, B65 0EE as well as on the website www.bcha.co.uk or by telephoning 0121 561 1969. For appeals against decisions that have been made applicants should, in the first instance, write and set out the basis of the appeal and send this to the Group's Head of Property Services. If this does not prove to be satisfactory the Complaints/Compliments procedure should be followed as detailed above.

Date Reviewed	November 2015	Next Review Date	November 2017
Reviewed By	K Smith	Approval By	Head of Property Services
Equality Impact Assessment	Complete	Responsible Officer	Lettings Manager
Distribution	Extranet/Teams/Schemes	Version No.	02