



Ongo Homes Lettings Policy December 2016

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| Agreed on: | 5 th December 2016 |
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1. Our policy is...

- 1.1 To deliver an effective, efficient and friendly Lettings Service and provide our customers with homes they want to live in line with all our statutory obligations.
- 1.2 The application of this policy ensures compliance with the outcomes of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England.
- 1.3 To manage customer expectations by supporting people to make realistic choices about where they live.
- 1.4 To let our properties in a fair and transparent way seeking to accommodate need and facilitate choice
- 1.5 To minimise the number of empty homes and create sustainable tenancies making best use of our housing stock
- 1.6 To make sure our customers are completely aware of their rights and responsibilities as a tenant of Ongo Homes.
- 1.7 To ensure our customers are kept informed throughout the lettings process.

2. It applies to...

- 2.1 All identified staff who have a responsibility to provide information in respect of the Allocation and Lettings Process or those who are directly responsible for the Allocation and Letting of our properties and garages.
- 2.2 All our empty residential properties and garages.
- 2.3 We aim to advertise 100% of our available properties through sub-regional choice based lettings schemes (e.g. HomeChoiceLincs (HCL)) or via Local Authority nomination agreements. We do have the flexibility however, to direct let a maximum of 25%.
- 2.4 This policy does not cover commercial properties. Please refer to the Commercial Property Lettings Policy.

3. Because we want to...

- 3.1 Deliver a Value for Money Lettings Service by providing homes to our customers that are let within an agreed timescale which meet the Lettable Standard (LS).
- 3.2 Maximise tenancy sustainability by ensuring homes meet the household needs and affordability is satisfied.
- 3.3 Make best use of our housing stock and let our empty properties in an efficient and fair way.

4. We will...

4.1 Manage our lettings process ensuring the best interests of both our customers and Ongo Homes

- 4.1.1 An applicant's priority for housing need will be determined by the relevant Local Authority in accordance with the HCL Choice Based Lettings Policy.
- 4.1.2 We may implement Local Lettings Policies (LLPs) and/or apply specific lettings criteria on individual properties. These would only be applied where a clear business case is evidenced or where a risk assessment indicates potential risks to an individual or the community. In all cases the reasons for the Local Lettings Policy or specific lettings criteria will be recorded and published as appropriate. When in force this may result in offers of accommodation being made to the most suitable applicant on the shortlist regardless of their position.
- 4.1.2 We have the provision to let homes directly in exceptional circumstances known as a "direct let". Properties used for direct lets will not usually be advertised on HCL or the advert will be withdrawn in line with the HCL Policy. For guidance around Direct Lets and exceptional circumstances, refer to the Lettings Exceptions Procedure.
- 4.1.3 Ongo Homes reserves the right not to make an offer of a tenancy to an applicant who has the financial capacity that they are able to access and utilise to reasonably resolve their own housing need. This will be determined by us carrying out an assessment of their financial resources. This may include but are not limited to:
- Savings/investments
 - Shares/Bonds
 - Residential Property
 - Inheritance
- 4.1.4 Age criteria applies to all sheltered/retirement scheme properties and other selected properties however, there may be circumstances when this restriction may be waived and will be managed on a case-by-case basis liaising with other departments within Ongo Homes or external agencies where we need to.
- 4.1.5 There may be times where we have to make a decision as to whether an applicant is suitable to be considered for a tenancy with us which may result in the applicant being suspended from the housing register please refer to the [HCL policy](#).
- 4.1.6 In some cases an applicant may be active on the HCL register but has a history of serious and significant anti-social behaviour against Ongo property or staff or other serious tenancy management issues. In these circumstances Ongo Homes reserves the right to refuse to house. In each case careful consideration will be applied to the particular facts to reaching a decision not to house.

- 4.1.7 There may be circumstances where a “sensitive let” is required when a previous tenant of the property has caused significant nuisance, alarm or distress to the community and may affect the future landlord function. This will be subject to approval by the Area Housing Manager and Lettings Manager who will agree the appropriate lettings criteria for that specific let.
- 4.2 Offer a consistent, accessible Lettings Service to ensure the needs of the applicants and business are met.**
- 4.2.1 We will advertise our available properties through choice based lettings websites that cover the area the properties are located or via Local Authority nomination agreements.
- 4.2.2 Eligible applicants will be invited to view the property, our usual practice is to host an Open House Viewing. The numbers invited to such viewings are at the discretion of the Lettings Officer, taking into account demand for the property and/or area.
- 4.2.3 If applicants are unable to attend the viewing, they must make contact with us or their application may be suspended in line with the HCL [Policy](#). We may make alternative arrangements in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.2.4 When applicants are not being considered to view a property, they will be “skipped” (see “what we mean” section below).
- 4.2.5 Applicants who require specific adaptations will need to have approval from an appropriate medical professional as to the suitability of the property before an offer is made.
- 4.2.6 We will make contact with the successful applicant to progress to the next stage of the lettings process and will allow the customer 48 hours to make a decision as to whether they wish to proceed.
- 4.2.7 The successful applicant will need to satisfy a robust pre-tenancy assessment and interview before a formal offer is made. This will include:
- affordability assessment
 - Payment of a minimum of a weeks rent in advance
 - Providing all requested documentation;
 - Confirmation of any support needs or requirements
- 4.2.8 If an applicant has satisfied all of the above but has an outstanding housing related debt under £250, we will consider putting a payment plan in place, which will form part of the Tenancy Agreement.
- 4.2.9 We advise prospective tenants to obtain independent legal advice on their new tenancy with us before signing their tenancy agreement.

4.2.10 We reserve the right to withdraw an offer of accommodation at any point in the allocation process if there is evidence to suggest there is a significant risk to the applicant being able to sustain a tenancy.

4.3 Consider Transfers for current tenants

4.3.1 Where a current tenant wants to transfer to another of our properties (internal transfer) they will not be eligible until the following criteria is met:

- Current rent account is clear (for HB claimants – clear at point of HB being applied to rent account) and has been positively managed for a reasonable period of time
- No other housing related debt e.g. recharges
- No open tenancy management or ASB cases
- No tenancy breaches in the last 12 months
- Satisfying a pre-leaving inspection

4.3.2 In addition to the above, where tenants are assessed as having no/low housing need (band 4), they will not normally be considered for a transfer until they have held their current tenancy with us for **at least 2 years** and have positively managed their tenancy for a reasonable period of time.

4.3.3 In some circumstances we may need to consider transfers in line with our Lettings Exceptions Procedure.

4.4 Consider all requests for Mutual Exchanges

4.4.1 We have a statutory duty to consider and respond to all applications for Mutual Exchange within 42 days of receipt of applications from all parties.

4.4.2 We will undertake the same checks and assessments as detailed in section 4.3.1 for our Mutual Exchanges.

4.4.3 We will not unreasonably refuse applications for Mutual Exchange, and each application will be assessed on its own merit ensuring the best interests of the customers and the business, taking into account all statutory legislation and regulation. Reasons for refusal may be that specific criteria is attached to the property, for example:

- The property has been adapted or has features that make it suitable for a disabled person and the incoming tenant does not require these adaptations;
- The property has been developed to accommodate particularly vulnerable people or specific client groups;

4.4.4 We will allow a maximum of 1-bedroom under occupation, subject to an affordability assessment.

4.4.5 We may attach conditions to consent for mutual exchange such as clearing rent arrears and/or housing related debt or carrying out repairs.

4.5 Provide tenancies to under 18s where necessary

- 4.5.1 Where a successful applicant is aged between 16 and 18 years of age, they will need to appoint a person to hold their tenancy on trust until they reach their 18th birthday unless North Lincolnshire Council has already been appointed as Trustee (this is usually the case for Care Leavers). If it is not possible to find a suitable Trustee, we will not grant a tenancy until the applicant reaches 18 years of age. There is no requirement for us to find a Trustee.

4.6 Allocate garages to customers

- 4.6.1 We will only allocate garages to applicants over-18 who are have an active application on the HCL website.
- 4.6.2 Allocations are made according to date of application.
- 4.6.3 Any specially adapted garages for disabled people will only be let to applicants who have demonstrable proof of need and own a car.
- 4.6.4 Applications for garages will not be approved whilst rent arrears against any current or former tenancy or any other debt with Ongo Homes exists and/or any other court action is in place.
- 4.6.5 Customers will sign a garage licence on allocation of a garage and abide by the conditions contained within.
- 4.6.6 We will take payment at sign-up of a months rent to secure a garage – the amount of this payment will be dependant on whether you are one of our current Ongo Homes tenants or leaseholders or not.

5 Making sure we do what we say...

- 5.1 The Head of Housing Management is responsible for making sure this policy is implemented.
- 5.2 The Lettings Manager is responsible for making sure:
- All identified staff are aware of this policy;
 - All staff are trained relevant to their role within this policy;
 - Monitoring records are kept in accordance with this policy; and
 - Customers are adequately informed of the policy and support is given to them to help understand it.
- 5.3 We will make sure we are doing what we say we will by measuring our performance through a suite of indicators on a monthly basis. We use monitoring and reporting mechanisms to identify and address issues that are causing tenants to leave our homes and/or affecting empty home periods.

6 Other things to bear in mind...

- 6.1 This policy also links to our:
- Suite of Lettings Procedures

- ASB policy
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Aids & Adaptations Policy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Decant Policy
- E&D Policy
- Maintenance Policy
- Income Collection Policy
- Lettings Criteria
- HCL Choice-Based-Lettings Policy
- Recharge Policy
- Tenure Policy
- Mental Capacity Guidance
- Tenancy Agreement

6.2 The main pieces of legislation and regulation relevant to this policy include:

- The Housing Acts [1985](#) and [1996](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [ASB Act 2003](#) & [ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Human Rights Act 1998](#)
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- [Regulating the Standards 2014](#)

7 **We'll look at this again...**

7.1 This policy will be reviewed in a year's time then every three years following on from that. We will review it earlier if any regulatory or legislative changes occur and have an impact on this policy.

8 **What we mean...**

| Reference | Definition |
|------------------|--|
| Customer | When referring to customer we mean tenants and applicants for housing or garages |
| Skipping Reasons | Examples of when applicants may be "skipped" on a property they have bid on (not exhaustive): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-adapted properties for those requiring specific adaptations • Does not meet financial criteria • Bedroom need/affordability • Does not meet Transfer Criteria |