



LETTINGS POLICY

1. Introduction

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

2. Policy statement

The Group manages over 1700 homes located throughout Sandwell and Dudley and in smaller pockets in Wolverhampton 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.

3. Related or relevant policy/procedure and other documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- **Aid 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 Policy**
- **Data Retention Policy**
- **The Group's Diversity Strategy**
- **Restricting access to Housing Policy**
- **Risk Assessment Policy**

4. Responsibilities

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

5. 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 enables these new homes that, in the first instance, the relevant local authority has the right to 'nominate', prospective tenants to us from their waiting lists.

For all other vacancies that occur, two thirds will let through our local authority partners and the final third from our own waiting lists.

Access via our Local Authority partners

We work jointly with councils and offer up to two thirds of our re-let vacancies to our Local Authority partners. Where Choice Based Lettings (CBL) arrangements exist, these vacancies will be made available through these schemes. Otherwise, vacancies will be filled via nominations direct from the relevant Local Authority waiting lists. All applicants who are nominated to the Group, following either CBL request or direct nomination, will be interviewed and considered in line with this Policy.

Access through our own waiting lists

We consider housing enquiries in writing, by telephone, email or in person at the office from all sections of the community. All housing related enquiries will have a pre-application assessment carried out. This assessment will explore possible housing options and provide the applicant with appropriate advice and assistance. Those applicants who we feel we can realistically assist and have significant housing need or a specific and significant reason for requesting one of the Group's properties will be invited to complete an application form to go on the Group's waiting lists.

6. Assessing housing need

The Group's aim is to ensure that the best use is made of the vacancies that occur and that these are let to those with the greatest housing need.

The housing need of an applicant will be assessed and they will be placed in one of three categories or bands. Band one, for those who need to move now and have the greatest need. Band two, for those who need to move in the near future and band three, for those who need to move in the longer term. An applicants' position within a band is determined by the date they registered.

7. 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
- Provide satisfactory references in relation to conduct of current and 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 (Proof of entitlement to welfare benefits will be accepted)

We reserve the right not to house particular individuals or households, Criteria for this can be found in detail in the Restricted Access to Housing Policy, and include those who:

- Are not eligible to hold a tenancy because of their immigration status
- Have a current or prior debt with the Group or other social housing provider and have not made an agreement to clear this debt, or if they have made an agreement but not kept to it

- Have abandoned a property or been evicted unless accepted by our local authority partners as being unintentionally homeless
- Have had any legal action taken against them for antisocial behaviour or criminal convictions of an anti-social nature

8. 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 as far as possible apply the following eligibility:

| 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 1,2 or 3 children |
| Four bedroom house | Parent(s) with 3 or 4 children |
| Five/six bedroom house | Parent(s) with 5 or 6 children |

9. Verification Checks and References

When an application is registered with us we will carry out a number of checks. Where previous tenancies have been held, we will require landlord references for the last five years. We will also ask to see 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.

10. Reviews

Applicants will be placed on our waiting list for 3 months. An applicant must inform us within 3 month timescales whether they wish to remain on the waiting list, failure to do so will see the registration cancelled.

11. Schedule 1, Housing Act 1996

Schedule 1 requires declaration of any conflict of interest and provides details of who can and cannot be assisted with housing. Any applicant who is known to a member of staff or member of the board of management must declare this on the 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.

12. 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. 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.

13. 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 Housing Manager. If this does not prove to be satisfactory the Complaints/Compliments procedure should be followed as detailed above.

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