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INTRODUCTION

Context

This policy ensures that Great Places is letting its properties fairly and efficiently, and making best use of its available housing. The policy promotes lettings decisions that support neighbourhood sustainability.

This lettings scheme deals with lets made to social housing properties let at a 'target rent' or an 'affordable rent' - up to 80% of the market rent. The allocation of other Great Places rental products such as Rent to Buy, and Market Rent Housing are not covered by this Policy. Mutual exchanges are not covered by this policy.

Aims & Objectives

As a Registered Provider Great Places has a duty to comply with the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England. Great Places' approach to allocations has been developed in line with the Tenancy Standard.

Great Places will facilitate a range of ways to access our properties. In line with the Equality Act 2010 this policy seeks to ensure that no applicant for housing is discriminated against on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation.

Great Places aims to make the best use of homes, which not only applies to the selection of housing applicants to become tenants based on the attributes of the property and the needs of the household, but also in considering the demography of the neighbourhood and allocating homes in a way which contributes to the establishment of sustainable communities.

Providing quality accommodation for those moving on from supported housing is a priority for Great Places and this is achieved through the transfer arrangements described in this policy, and through collaboration with Local Authorities.

If significant changes are made to our approach to allocating homes we will consult with stakeholders and service users in the formulation and review of this policy and associated procedures.

Eligibility for Rehousing

Great Places Housing Group welcomes applications from anyone aged sixteen or over. Applicants between the ages of sixteen and eighteen will be granted a tenancy subject to specific criteria.

Applications where one or more adult household members are found not to have the 'Right to Rent' in England may not be accepted onto Great Places' waiting lists for housing. If any member of a household applying for housing is found not to have a Right to Rent in the UK the household will not be offered a home. More information about Right to Rent is available from the Government website www.gov.uk

Lettings to Staff, Family Members and Close Connections

Applicants for re-housing who are employees of Great Places Housing Group, relatives of employees or close connections should declare this on their application form. These applications will be handled in accordance with Great Places' Probity Policy.

Exceptional Circumstances

There may occasionally be exceptional circumstances in which an allocation may be made outside of this policy.

NOMINATIONS AND COMMON ALLOCATIONS FRAMEWORKS

In all of the Local Authority areas in which Great Places operates the Local Authority has an allocations policy which is used to nominate housing applicants for a proportion of available homes. Applications for these homes should be made according to the Local Authority's allocations policy.

The proportion of Great Places homes which are allocated according to the Local Authority policy varies in different areas; in some areas a nominations agreement is in place with the Local Authority which details the proportion of properties Great Places will make available for nomination by the Council, in other areas Great Places is part of a Common Allocations Framework whereby the Local Authority's policy is used to identify applicants for all of Great Places' available homes. In most cases the majority of sheltered, adapted, supported and bungalow accommodation will be offered for nomination by the Local Authority as the applicants who are likely to be eligible for this housing will be registered with the Local Authority.

Each Local Authority policy adheres to the legal requirements of the Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and therefore meets all statutory requirements relating to eligibility and qualification for housing. Local Authority policies are framed to provide Reasonable Preference to those with housing need, and Great Places' participation with the Local Authority scheme therefore ensures that those with housing need have priority access to a proportion of homes.

The Local Authority policy will usually describe the types of properties eligible applicants can apply for, how eligible applicants will be prioritised, and the method of allocating homes. In most cases the Local Authority uses a choice based lettings system, however some use a system of direct matching applicants to available properties. More information is available from individual Local Authorities.

Where an applicant is nominated or applies for an allocation through a Common Allocations Framework the applicant will not be subject to Great Places' refusal criteria, unless the Local Authority Policy allows for these criteria to be applied. All applicant households will be subject to Right to Rent checks and may be refused an offer of accommodation if it is found that any member of the household does not have the Right to Rent in the UK. More information can be found at www.gov.uk.

The Housing Act requires Local Authorities to make a summary of the Allocations Scheme available to all housing applicants free of charge.

When a property is offered for nomination or is advertised through a Common Allocations Framework but the property is not successfully allocated Great Places may use other methods to advertise the property.

ALLOCATIONS OUTSIDE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ALLOCATIONS POLICIES

Properties which are not allocated through a Local Authority Allocations Scheme will be allocated according through a variety of methods and will be subject to the criteria set out in this policy.

Property Size and Type

Great Places will prioritise specific household types for available properties as follows;

Property Type	Household Type
Houses and maisonettes	Families with children
Flats above ground floor level with internal communal areas	All adult households. Households with uncaged pets are not accepted.
Flats without internal communal areas, and flats with internal communal areas but which are on the ground floor	All households
Studios / Bedsits	Single people and couples
Bungalows	Households requiring ground floor accommodation
Adapted properties (including wheelchair accessible housing)	Households requiring the adaptations
Sheltered and older people's accommodation	Single people and couples where all household members meet the age criteria or have a need for support

Where the preferred household type is not identified for a property an allocation may be made to a different household type, with the exception of studios/bedsits.

Preference will be given to households who require a home of the size available, as assessed using the government's Bedroom Standard. The majority of homes will be allocated to applicants who require a property with the corresponding number of bedrooms. Where an applicant has staying access to children this will be taken into account in accommodation size made available to them, however where there is high demand priority will be given to households with full time access to children.

A property may be allocated to a household which will under-occupy the home if the property is in low demand, where a Local Lettings Policy is in place which permits under occupation to promote scheme sustainability, or where a suitable household requiring accommodation of the size available is not identified. Under-occupation may also be allowed in exceptional circumstances to promote the welfare of the household e.g. where a disabled person requires internal storage space for equipment or an occasional bedroom for a

carer. An allocation will only normally be made to a household which will under-occupy a property if the household can demonstrate that they have sufficient financial resources to meet the rent and any other charges on the property.

Great Places Waiting List

In the Bury and Stoke Local Authority areas Great Places operates a waiting list. For available homes which are not allocated according to Local Authority nominations in these areas Great Places may consider allocating the property from the waiting list.

A banding system is used to prioritise applicants for rehousing. The tables below provide examples of the circumstances which would be awarded priority. The examples provided are not exhaustive; Great Places may from time to time exercise discretion to award priority for circumstances other than those described in this policy. (Please note a slightly different approach to banding is applied to transfer applicants – see page 11.)

Band A – High Level Needs

Statutory homeless inc. refugees with leave to remain and are required to leave home in the next 28 days.

Proof required from local authority.

Victim of hate crime or harassment with threat of violence (Including Domestic Violence). Re-housing will normally only be considered outside the current neighbourhood, and advice from other agencies such as the Police may be sought. Supporting evidence can take the form of a Police report or report from a Housing Officer/Neighbourhood Coordinator involved in the case.

Emergency medical, welfare or disability. Emergency Medical banding is granted only in exceptional circumstances. This includes when the applicant or a member of the applicant's household has a life threatening condition, which is seriously affected by their current housing, or their home cannot be accessed due to ill health or disability. This status must be backed up by a medical assessment undertaken by the local authority housing team.

Witness requiring protection from threat of violence. Re-housing will normally only be considered outside the current neighbourhood, and advice from other agencies such as the Police may be sought. Supporting evidence can take the form of a Police report or report from a Housing Officer/Neighbourhood Coordinator involved in the case.

Severe overcrowding. Overcrowded by three or more bedrooms.

Home subject to a clearance order by local authority, Great Places Housing Group another housing association. Great Places Housing Group will only award this status to applicants within a local authority area in which they work and may restrict offers to that area.

Households needing re-housing to leave an institution e.g. nursing home or hospital, or leaving the Armed Forces, or have left in the last 6 months and have not found settled accommodation

Households in supported housing that have been assessed as ready to move onto independent accommodation. Households must be expected to leave independent accommodation within 6 months. Evidence from the Support Worker is required.

Band B – General Housing Need

Households facing hardship by current housing situation. Including those who have a need to move related to work.
Homeless households where the local authority does not have a duty to re-house.
Where a family with children are unable to live together as a result of their housing situation
Victim of hate crime or harassment (without threat of violence). Re-housing will normally only be considered outside the current neighbourhood, and advice from other agencies such as the Police may be sought
Overcrowding. Overcrowded by one or two bedrooms.
Medical need. Applicants who need to move on medical grounds because their current home is having an adverse effect on the health of a member of the household, but who do not qualify for emergency medical priority.
Households needing to be re-housed to allow them to adopt or foster, or to be able to have access to children
Under occupation of social rented property. Under-occupying by two bedrooms or more.
Households needing to move to be closer to people providing support or to provide support
Households requiring re-housing because of a relationship breakdown
Households requiring move on accommodation from supported housing. Evidence supporting application is required from support worker
Property unfit or lacks basic amenities (private sector only)
Households that have to share facilities with others outside their household
Need for independent accommodation
Households who wish to live closer to work or educational establishment

Under-occupancy and overcrowding will be assessed using the Bedroom standard. A household will not be considered to be deficient of a bedroom as a result of two adults who are not part of a couple are sharing a bedroom. If a household is found to have become deliberately overcrowded, where this could have been avoided priority will not be awarded. Lodgers will not be taken into account when awarding overcrowding status

Band C – No Housing Need

All other applicants for re-housing will be placed in Band C.

Priority Within Bands

Priority within bands will normally be by date order.

The relevant date will be the date that band status is confirmed and not original date of application. Where an applicant changes band because of a change of circumstances the relevant date will be the date that the new band status is confirmed except where applicants are trading down to band C (no need).

Where ground floor or bungalow accommodation becomes available applicants within a short list with medical priority requiring ground floor will be considered first.

Direct Advertising

Properties which are not allocated through the Local Authority's allocations policy may be allocated by advertising the property through a direct advertising method. This may include (but not restricted to) advertising through Rightmove, local lettings agents, newspaper and social network advertising.

Where properties are advertised through these methods a first come first served approach will be applied. The first applicant to apply for the property who is eligible and able to afford the rent and any other charges on the property will be offered the home. Applicant's eligibility for the property will be assessed in accordance with the refusals criteria. Preference for properties will be given to those who require the size and type advertised.

Owner Occupiers

Owners and owner occupiers will be asked about any possible capital to gain and where it is likely to exceed £75,000

Where an owner occupier is applying to join a Great Places waiting list the Customer Services Manager will make an assessment of an applicant's circumstances (e.g. age, income, infirmity) and when he/she thinks that an applicant has sufficient funds to purchase a private property, the applicant will be advised that they can register for rehousing and will be placed in Band C on the waiting list.

Owners and owner-occupiers experiencing a relationship breakdown or who have been awarded Medical priority will not have possible future capital gains taken into account where the property is unlikely to be sold in the near future. Discretion will also be used by the Customer Services Manager where the applicant's rehousing circumstances dictate that capital gains shouldn't be considered. For example sheltered housing applicants with support needs.

Applicants who are owners or owner-occupiers should be aware that the spirit of the policy involves them intending to sell the property.

Preference will be given to applicants through direct advertising mechanisms who are not owner occupiers.

TRANSFERS

Great Places Housing Group will consider transfer requests from tenants who have been resident for a minimum of 1 year (except in exceptional circumstances as agreed by the Neighbourhood Manager). Transfer applicants will only be accepted from tenants where

- There is no damage/re-chargeable repairs to the property
- There are no rent arrears or other charges owing, or the applicant is in arrears but subject to a GPHG Financial Inclusion assessment, a transfer will help to alleviate financial hardship.

- The applicant is not subject to ASB enforcement or legal action as a result of breaching the conditions of tenancy.
- The applicant is not a Starter Tenant or Introductory Tenant.
- The applicant has an appropriate care or support package in place if transferring from a sheltered or supported property.
- The applicant has not deliberately attempted to obtain a general transfer fraudulently by knowingly falsifying information.

Priority for Transfers

Great Places will offer priority to transfer applicants who meet one or more of the following criteria;

Priority Group		Criteria
1	Permanent decant	GPHG need to transfer tenants in order to facilitate planned demolition, major refurbishment works or the sale of a housing scheme considered to be unsustainable. *Applicants will be subject to Great Places decant policy & procedure. These applicants will take priority for a move over all other applicants on the transfer list.
2	Down sizing (Under occupying)	Applicants who currently under occupy a property and their 'housing benefit' has been reduced. Applicants who are under occupying by two bedrooms or more should be given higher priority than applicants who under occupy by one bedroom.
3	Financial hardship	Applicants who are adequately housed but facing financial hardship. *Subject to a referral from the financial inclusion team.
4	Supported housing move on	Applicants who currently occupy supported accommodation and who have demonstrated they have the abilities and skills to successfully maintain a general needs tenancy. *Applicants will be subject to Great Places supported housing policy and procedure.
5	High demand	Applicants occupying a property considered to be in high demand provided that they are willing to move to a lower demand property type or area e.g. house to a flat.
6	Chain move	Applicants who do not meet any of the additional preference criteria but their transfer would facilitate a chain move involving at least one 3 bed or more property.
7	Adaptations	Applicants who need a property with major adaptations. *Applicants will be subject to Great Places aids and adaptations policy & procedure.

Applicants who do not meet the criteria detailed in the table above can be registered for a transfer list but will not receive the priority of those who meet the criteria listed above.

Applicants will be prioritised according to their date of registration. Therefore if 2 or more applicants (with any priority or multiple priorities) are matched to an available property, it should be offered to the earliest application date first.

Where there are no suitable applicants with priority for a transfer applications not considered to have priority under this scheme should be considered. The date the application was accepted will be used to determine priority between these applicants.

Applicant Refusals

Applicants who refuse to move after three reasonable transfer offers, will cease to qualify for a general transfer and will be removed from the transfer waiting list. Subsequently, the tenant may not re-apply for a general transfer on the same grounds.

REFUSALS CRITERIA

The refusals criteria will be applied:

- To applicants applying to join the Great Places waiting list for Stoke or Bury
- To applicants applying to join the Great Places transfer waiting list
- To applicants identified through a direct advertising mechanism
- To applicants who have been nominated by a Local Authority or have been shortlisted for a property through a common allocation framework, where the Local Authority policy allows for the allocating landlord to apply their own lettings criteria

Applicants who meet one or more of the refusals criteria will not be eligible for an allocation of a home or to join a Great Places waiting list, except in exceptional circumstances (as decided by the Neighbourhood Manager).

The refusals criteria are as follows;

Debts

The applicant/member of applying household:

- Has an existing outstanding debt to GPHG, another RSL, Local Authority or Private Landlord and cannot demonstrate that they have a current repayment agreement proportional to the debt, and that they have maintained it for a minimum of 12 months immediately prior to application.
- Is a transfer applicant or former GPHG tenant with an existing outstanding debt, e.g. rent arrears or recharges.

Antisocial Behaviour

Definition of anti-social behaviour: An individual has acted in a manner that has caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as him/herself.

There is evidence that the applicant/member of the applying household:

- Has acted in an anti-social behaviour within the last 5 years for which, had there been a tenancy in place, it would be reasonable for a court to grant a possession order, and may pose a threat/risk to GPHG, the tenants of GPHG or the community.

Criminal Behaviour

The applicant/member of applying household has:

Been convicted of a 'serious offence' that has not been spent, and they may pose a threat/risk to GPHG, the tenants of GPHG or the community.

Examples of 'serious offences' include:

- Public order offences, nuisance, vandalism
- Dealing, supplying or cultivating controlled drugs
- Burglary, robbery, theft
- Violence
- Schedule 1 offences
- Offences relating to hate crimes

Unmet Support Needs

Where the applicant/member of applying household:

- Is unable to sustain their tenancy due to un-met support needs
- Requires a high level of support that would seriously undermine GPHG's ability to support other residents.

Where it is identified an applicant/member of the applying household has/may have support needs that are not being met by a support provider/ may not be able to sustain their own tenancy, a needs assessment should be undertaken to determine whether the individual is able to sustain a tenancy.

General

- The applicant has not provided satisfactory references or supporting information, e.g. a risk assessment.
- There is evidence that the applicant has provided false information which is relevant to the housing application.
- There is evidence that the applicant/member of the applying household has seriously breached a GPHG, other RSL or LA tenancy/behaved in a way that would constitute a breach of tenancy conditions for which it would be reasonable for a court to grant a possession order.

Examples include:

- Not ending a tenancy in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement.
- Malicious damage to a GPHG, other RSL or LA property.
- The applicant is not eligible for rehousing (see page 3)
- Unwilling to co-operate with GPHG in the completing of a needs assessment.

- Unwilling to comply with any imposed conditions of tenancy, e.g. floating support.
- GPHG does not have accommodation suitable to the applicant's needs.
- The applicant is under the age of 18 and does not meet the criteria outlined in the "Re-housing under 18's procedure".
- The applicant is a person from abroad prescribed as ineligible by the Secretary of State

If an application or an offer for housing is refused the reason for the refusal will be explained to the applicant. The applicant may reapply for housing at any time but will not be reconsidered unless there is adequate proof that the reason for the refusal no longer applies.

LOCAL LETTINGS POLICIES

Local lettings policies are designed to encourage sustainability in a local area, this could be to address a particular problem such as anti-social behaviour or to ensure a balanced community is maintained. A local lettings policy might restrict lets to certain types of applicant or may allocate available properties taking into account special criteria. Applicants who do not meet these criteria may be bypassed. Great Places will clearly state any restrictions when advertising a property.

Local lettings policies will be established in consultation with Local Authority partners and other stakeholders, and will be reviewed annually to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs of the area for which they are in place and do not unnecessarily restrict access to housing. The Local Lettings Policy must receive approval from a Regional Manager and the Local Authority.

EMERGENCY AND MANAGEMENT TRANSFERS

Emergency and management transfers will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Examples of such circumstances include;

- Single people or couples living in large family accommodation who require smaller property.
- Exceptional cases of Anti Social Behaviour and Harassment, including serious or targeted hate crimes and serious racial harassment, where the ASB has been investigated and prolonged/ targeted abuse is having a significant impact on the victim's quality of life. This to be done in clear view of alternative remedies and in line with broad principles of tackling ASB and in the clear interest of community safety.
- Elderly or disabled customers living in accommodation where severe hardship is incurred through the unsuitability of current dwelling. These will transfer on a like for like basis.
- In cases of Domestic Violence
- Where there are Safeguarding Issues
- Emergency Health and Safety Issues i.e Fire/Flood

The Neighbourhood Manager will consider the following factors when deciding whether an emergency transfer should be offered;

- The tenant/resident owes significant rent arrears and/or is failing to comply with a current or past repayment agreement or possession order.
- The tenant has been convicted for using the property for an illegal or immoral purpose.
- The tenant or members of their household have caused nuisance and annoyance to neighbours or visitors.
- The tenant or members of their household have committed certain criminal offences in or near the home and still posing a threat to neighbours or the community.
- The tenant has been found to be violent towards a partner or members of the family.
- The tenant has allowed the condition of the property to deteriorate or caused major damage to the current property.
- The tenant has allowed any furniture provided by the landlord to deteriorate due to ill treatment

These factors may or may not prevent an emergency transfer from taking place depending on the individual case.

A suitable property will be identified and offered to the household. If the offer is refused by the applicant the reasons for refusal will be considered. If these are deemed to be unreasonable reasons for refusal, the customer will be required to apply for rehousing either through a transfer with Great Places, through Local Authority rehousing services, or by applying for homes marketed through Direct Advertising.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Communication of Decisions

Applicants who are not allowed to join the waiting list will be told the full reason for the decision and given guidance as to how they can rectify the situation and become eligible for rehousing.

Where an applicant is refused an offer of accommodation the reasons for the refusal will be explained to the applicant.

Review of Decision and Complaints

An applicant can request a review of any decision adversely affecting their application for rehousing (including the decision to refuse an offer of accommodation, or a decision relating to the banding of an applicant). Applicants can request a review of a decision in accordance with GPHG Complaints Procedure.

Information and Data Protection

All information provided to Great Places Housing Group will be kept confidential though we may share information with partner local authorities and other registered landlords. Information is only used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Who's Responsible?

- Housing Services teams are responsible for ensuring that lettings are made in line with the policy.
- Customer Service Officers are responsible for initially banding applicants and providing housing options advice.
- Neighbourhood Managers will monitor lettings in their region to ensure properties are being let efficiently and to appropriate applicants.

Equality Impact Assessment Screening

Question	Yes/No (add explanatory notes if appropriate)
Could there be any equality issues arising from this policy? (If no, you do not need to answer the following questions but must provide justification for why)	No – this policy brings together a number of existing policies which have already been through the EIA process and confirmed as not creating any equality issues. This policy does not present any changes to the current working practices aside from the introduction of Right to Rent checks which are a statutory requirement and are not influenced by Great Places.
Is there any reason that some groups may not receive a fair and equal service?	
Could this issue have a significant impact?	
Will the policy impact on a significant proportion of people? (include justification for why you think it is significant or not)	
Is there any reason to believe service user/employee profile is not consistent with community profile?	
Is there any evidence to suggest that any part of the policy, practice or procedure could discriminate unlawfully, directly or indirectly, against different groups?	
Total	0 – No EIA Required

Policy Approval Date:	14 th April 2016
Equality Impact Assessment Date:	8 th April 2011 (for previous lettings policy – content unchanged for this version)
Safeguarding impact	N/A
Policy Review Date:	May 2017
Lead Team:	Housing Services
Level of Authorisation Required:	Directors