



Lettings Policy

Adopted:	
Contact Officer:	Head of Lettings
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Formal Review of Policy by:	Executive Leadership Team or Board
Policy Links:	Home Choice Lincs Policy Boston Homechoice Policy Void Management Policy Complaints and Compensation Policy Tenancy Policy Mutual Exchange Policy Equal Opportunities Policy Health & Safety Policy

Brief Policy Summary:

This policy sets out the approach that will be taken by LHP, working within the choice based lettings schemes it currently participates in, to effectively market and let our properties.

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 Lincolnshire Housing Partnership aims to make best use of its housing stock and address housing need in its areas of operation. This policy sets out how we let our homes to suitable applicants, how we will market our homes and what checks, exclusions or exceptions we may apply.
- 1.2 The policy ensures that we are meeting the requirements of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 The policy objectives are to:
 - Let homes to suitable customers
 - Be consistent, fair and transparent in the way we let our homes
 - Make sure applicants understand their rights and responsibilities
 - Assist our local authority partners in meeting housing need in line with our local housing partnership commitments
 - Minimise the number of vacant homes and associated rent loss
 - Ensure that all homes are let to our agreed lettings standard
 - Help create sustainable communities

3. Scope

- 3.1 The policy will be applied to all applicants for housing with LHP, either from the relevant housing registers through our choice based lettings partnership agreements, or applicants from other sources, such as Kwik Key, Right Move, social media or other sources.

4 How we let our homes

- 4.1 We expect outgoing tenants to provide us with formal notice, in line with their tenancy terms (usually 28 days' notice), that they are leaving their home. When we receive notice we will ask the departing tenant why they are leaving. If they are leaving because they are dissatisfied with the property or with our services we will discuss this with them and try to find a way to help them stay in their home. This may include identifying any digital solutions (for example the LifeLine service) that may assist them to remain in their home. We will arrange a visit to their home during the notice period.
- 4.2 The purpose of the visit is: to discuss if there is any way we can prevent the termination; to assess what level of works will be required in the property for relet; to highlight any repair recharges and inform the tenant of their obligation to rectify, and to notify them of the charges that will apply if they are unable to do so, and; to discuss any arrears on their rent account and our expectation that these will be cleared by the termination date.
- 4.3 In the first instance our empty properties will be advertised through the relevant partnership choice based lettings (cbl) scheme in our main operating areas. The relevant schemes are:

North East Lincolnshire Council area: Home Choice Lincs (HCL)
Boston Borough Council area: Boston Home Choice (BHC)

In addition, we have properties and work with our partners in the East Lindsey, West Lindsey and South Kesteven District Council areas in order to advertise or receive nominations for homes in these areas.

- 4.4 Each cbl scheme operates its own policy for awarding priority to housing applicants, according to their housing need, and to reflect local circumstances. The schemes are broadly similar, operating as they do to reflect the legal requirement for priority to be given to “reasonable preference” groups and to allow for certain applicants to be excluded from the register.

4.5 *Homes advertised through Home Choice Lincs and Boston Home Choice*

Adverts are placed for each available home, in advance of them being ready to let in order to minimise the relet time.

Properties are advertised through BHC on a weekly basis, commencing on a Friday with the advert remaining open for one week. HCL adverts may be placed on any day, with the advert remaining open for one week also.

Once a property has been advertised the resulting shortlist will be used to identify a suitable applicant. Viewings, in some cases multi-applicant viewings, will be arranged and a provisional offer made, in order of priority band.

4.6 Adapted properties and applicants requiring adaptations

Properties which are either fully adapted or have a number of major adaptations will be advertised with these details and priority for these will be given to applicants who have a need for those adaptations. This will include, level access showers, ramped access, widened doorways, hoists, stairlifts etc. Where no suitable applicant has bid on the property under one of the choice based lettings scheme we may choose to contact partner agencies in order to identify a suitable applicant who has a need for the adaptations, in order to make best use of the available stock. We will only remove adaptations where all potential options to find a suitable tenant with a requirement for the adaptations have been exhausted. Adaptations will be reused and recycled if possible.

4.7 Making best use of LHP stock

We aim to house applicants in to properties so that we are making the best use of our available stock. This means that we will let properties based on the size of the property and the household make-up of the applicant to minimise any under-occupation of our properties.

4.8 Suitability for LHP accommodation

In order to ensure that lettings are suitable and sustainable we will carry out a number of checks prior to proceeding with an offer of accommodation.

4.8.1 *Affordability*

All applicants will undergo a “pre-tenancy financial assessment” to confirm their ability to pay their rent and other commitments (such as Council Tax, utilities, food and other household expenditure, any debt or loan repayment commitments etc.). Where an applicant fails this assessment the offer of

accommodation will not proceed and they will be given advice regarding how to improve their circumstances so that they are “tenancy ready”.

All applicants are required to pay no less than one weeks rent in advance at sign-up in order to ensure that the tenant is complying with the terms of the tenancy agreement for rent weekly in advance, and also to confirm and reinforce the ethos that payment of rent is the tenants responsibility, regardless of any benefit entitlement.

4.8.2 *Support to sustain a tenancy*

Where an individual may require care or support to be able to maintain their tenancy we will request the appropriate care and support plans from the relevant agencies. We may identify where any digital solutions may be appropriate to assist an applicant in sustaining a new tenancy. Even when these are in place there may be some circumstances where LHP accommodation may be considered unsuitable as the level of need is considered to be too high. A risk based approach will be taken and a full consideration of the individual and their circumstances, in liaison with relevant agencies, will be carried out before any decision to decline housing.

4.8.3 *Mental capacity*

There are certain groups of applicants who may have difficulty in understanding the rights and responsibilities that a tenancy entails, and who may potentially struggle to manage and sustain the tenancy. Applicants may be suspended from the register and therefore ineligible for an offer of accommodation in the first instance, but for those who are active and able to bid, under The Mental Capacity Act 2005, the landlord must complete an assessment in order to determine their ability to understand and comply with the tenancy terms. These assessments will be carried out as appropriate and used to determine whether an offer of accommodation will proceed. An assessment would need to be carried out each time the applicant came up for an offer of accommodation.

4.8.4 *Housing applicants with convictions*

Where an applicant has declared convictions we will carry out a risk assessment to determine whether LHP accommodation will be offered. Our decision will be based on the type of offence and the length of time since the offending took place and the potential risk to the wider neighbourhood and community.

For MAPPAⁱ or MARACⁱⁱ clients, who may only be housed in a specific area or in a specific property type, we will liaise with colleagues in the police service to check the suitability of the proposed accommodation.

4.8.5 *Suitability for a particular property type*

There may be occasions where an applicants may have particular needs and circumstances (for example any previous convictions or a mental health condition) which makes some property types less suitable, for instance properties with communal entrances or conversely a particular property type may be preferred.

5 **Hard to Let properties**

For properties which are not let through the initial cbl schemes, we may offer incentives, for example, additional decoration or flooring in order to make the property more lettable.

We may decide to market the property using alternative such as Right Move or social media, in order to secure a suitable tenant. For properties advertised this way we are able to relax the criteria for “bedroom need”, providing the applicant can demonstrate affordability of a home larger than their needs. Other criteria, such as age restrictions for older person’s accommodation, may also be relaxed.

Properties, or types of properties, that remain difficult to let and have a prolonged and sustained adverse effect on overall void figures and on void rent loss will be subject to an appraisal, as per our asset management strategy, in order to determine actions necessary to remedy this. This may include improvements or alterations, environmental improvements or modifications, conversion or ultimately disposal.

For properties in North East Lincolnshire where there is previous evidence of low demand, we may agree periodically with NELC that there is no requirement for an initial advert through HCL and we may proceed in the first instance to market the property through other routes, in order to minimise the relet time.

6 Lettings standard

All of our properties will be let to our “Lettings standard” which is periodically reviewed and amended, in consultation with customers. This sets out the minimum standard that our properties will be at when we sign up our new tenants. Depending on the condition of the property we may offer a decoration allowance, which will be based on the type of property, number and size of the rooms, current condition of the property, and the demand for the property.

7 Homes for Older people

In addition to our general needs stock there are certain properties that we specifically designate for “older people” and/or people with assessed need for support. This includes sheltered schemes that may have communal lounge, kitchen, laundry, lift, LifeLine services, etc., grouped flats that are designated for older people as part of a localised approach to make best use of our stock, bungalows that were grouped by design to create an older person’s community and which in some cases are attached to sheltered schemes (with tenants having access to and use of communal facilities which they are then service charged for).

Periodic review of these properties and their use and designation will be undertaken, as part of our asset management strategy.

8 Transfers

Current LHP tenants who register on either the HCL or BHC scheme will be assessed by the administrating authority and awarded a priority band in accordance with the relevant policy.

We will allow an LHP tenant to transfer provided:

- They have been a tenant of their home for at least 12 months and have no rent or housing related debt
- The tenant has allowed access for a pre-leaving visit for us to inspect the property and we are satisfied that they have taken reasonable care of their home and garden, in line with their tenancy conditions
- The tenant has cooperated with us to allow prospective applicants to view the property during the notice period
- The tenant has otherwise kept to the terms of their tenancy agreement and there have been no breaches of the tenancy during the preceding 12 months

Where a transfer applicant is currently adequately housed, and therefore has no priority for rehousing under the relevant cbl scheme, a “like for like” move within the immediate environs (within 1 mile radius) will not generally be approved. An exception may be allowed for residents of sheltered schemes who may have a preference for a ground floor flat, rather than a first floor or who wish to move from studio to one bedroom flats.

We will continue to publicise and promote mutual exchange as an option for current tenants who wish to transfer and will provide information and advice to current tenants to assist them, as appropriate. Full details of how we will deal with applications for an exchange are included in the LHP mutual exchange policy.

9 Succession

Applications for succession to a tenancy are considered by the housing teams, in line with relevant legislation. Where an occupant is entitled to succeed, but not to that particular property, they will be required to register on the relevant cbl scheme and will be awarded priority. They will be expected to place bids through the scheme and this will be monitored to ensure that they are able to secure suitable alternative accommodation.

10 Local lettings policies

In order to create and maintain balanced and sustainable communities we may implement local lettings policies, in agreement with our local authority partners. This may be to address specific local issues such as:

- Areas with a high number of vulnerable or older households
- Areas with a history of anti-social behaviour which we are trying to improve

The local lettings policy will be evidence based and for a defined geographical area or group of properties, and may be implemented for a limited period of time.

11 New build homes

When allocating and letting new build homes we will work with the relevant local authority to ensure that we comply with any planning agreements in place, such as s.106 agreements.

For new build properties in the North East Lincolnshire Council area we have an agreement to offer additional priority to serving or former members of the

Armed Forces in order for them to access secure and affordable housing (up to a maximum of 5 lettings per year).

12 Sensitive lettings

In order to ensure a sustainable tenancy for the applicant, or to prevent potential housing management issues that may result from an unsuitable match, we may apply a sensitive letting. This means that we may depart from our usual allocation practice and instead of allocating a property to applicants in order of their priority (based on housing need), we will consider the suitability of the applicant for the property on the basis of the information we have about them.

13 Management transfers

There may be exceptional circumstances where a tenant needs to be moved as a matter of urgency or priority, either to maintain balanced and stable communities, to protect vulnerable tenants (including cases of harassment or domestic violence) or tenants who have lost their home due to fire, flood etc. In addition, there may be instances where an urgent move is required for technical reasons, for example, major structural repairs, damp, asbestos etc.

The applicant should be placed into the appropriate priority band and would usually be expected to place bids on suitable properties as they are advertised. Where the applicant is placed in a priority band for a management transfer, but is either unable or unwilling to place bids themselves, or the need for rehousing is urgent and immediate, a Direct Let or Match may be considered.

Applicants who would otherwise be offered a temporary decant for works, such as damp works, may be offered an alternative “like for like” move, a “permanent decant”, in order to reduce the overall cost for LHP.

14 Lettings to employees and their close relatives

Applicants for housing are asked to declare if they are related to LHP staff or if they work for a partnership landlord. Any letting to an existing employee or their close relatives (for example spouse, civil partner, child, brother, sister, parent, parent in law, grandparent, grandchild, guardian, adoptive parent, adopted child) must be approved in advance by the Chief Executive in order to ensure the probity of the let.

15 Former tenant debts

Where a former tenant has applied for rehousing and has outstanding housing related debt with LHP, if they are below the relevant threshold for the appropriate cbl scheme and are active on the housing register we may agree to rehouse them and write the debts in to the new tenancy agreement.

16 Refusal of accommodation

The relevant cbl policy for each local authority area provides information on the review and appeal mechanisms available to applicants. If an applicant is unhappy with a decision made by LHP to refuse housing then a complaint may be submitted which will be investigated and responded to in line with the LHP complaints policy.

17 Implementation, Monitoring and Performance

17.1 The Head of Lettings is responsible for implementing and monitoring performance of this policy.

17.2 The Head of Lettings will monitor the following:

- The number of properties empty and available for let
- The average relet time for empty properties
- The number of lets achieved
- The numbers being rehoused through each scheme, by priority band
- The numbers being rehoused through each scheme who are current tenants (transfers)

17.3 The Performance Team will monitor satisfaction with the lettings process.



Equality Impact Assessment Initial Screening

Name of policy / strategy / project (the” initiative”):

Lettings Policy

Provide a brief summary of the aims and main activities of the initiative: (bullet points)

The policy sets out the approach that LHP will take, working within the CBL schemes it currently participates in (for the North HomeChoice Lincs and for the South Boston Home Choice), to effectively market and let our homes to suitable applicants, in a fair open and transparent way.

The policy aims to harmonise previous policies for SHP and BM in order to provide a clear and consistent service to our customers and applicants and to reduce overall void numbers and relet times.

Completed by: Leigh Collingwood

Date: 17 December 2018

STAGE 1: SCREENING

This stage establishes whether a proposed initiative will have an impact from an equality perspective on any particular group of people or community – i.e. on the grounds of race, religion/faith/belief, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, age, disability, or whether it is “equality neutral” (i.e. have no effect either positive or negative).

Q 1. Who will benefit from this initiative? Is there likely to be a positive impact on specific groups/communities (whether or not they are the intended beneficiaries), and if so, how? Or is it clear at this stage that it will be equality ‘neutral’ i.e. will have no particular effect on any group? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

The Policy potentially benefits all housing applicants equally.

Q 2. Is there likely to be an adverse impact on one or more minority/under-represented or community group as a result of this initiative? If so, who may be affected and why: Or is it clear at this stage that it will be equality 'neutral'? Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

Not as a direct result of the policy, however, we know that we have a shortfall of suitably adapted homes held within our current stock. However, the policy seeks to clarify our stances in terms of who we will let our properties to in order to make the best use of the limited amount of fully or partially adapted property that we hold.

Q 3. Is there sufficient data on the target beneficiary groups/communities? Are any of these groups under or over represented? Do they have access to the same resources? What are your sources of data and are there any gaps? Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

The policy is neutral in that it does not discriminate between the various groups or communities.

Q 4. Outsourced services – if the initiative is partly or wholly provided by external organisations / agencies, please list any arrangements you plan to ensure that they promote equality and diversity. Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

The policy is implemented and monitored internally.

Q 5. Is the impact of the initiative (whether positive or negative) significant enough to warrant a full impact assessment – see guidance? If not, will there be monitoring and review to assess the level of impact over a period of time? Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

No – we will continue to work with our partners through our development programme to bring more suitably adapted properties in to our stock, and we continue to work with partners in local authority and the Occupational Therapy service to carry out adaptations to currently tenanted properties where this is the preferred option.

Q 6. To be completed at six monthly review Detail actions taken to assess the level of impact over a period of time, or to address any gaps in data. Please consider all aspect of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality

This will be picked up as part of the periodic review of the policy.

Guidelines: Things to consider

- Where a negative (i.e. adverse) impact is identified, it may be appropriate to make a full EIA (see Stage 2), or, as important, take early action to redress this – e.g. by abandoning or modifying the initiative. NB If the initiative contravenes equality legislation; it must be abandoned or modified.
- Where an initiative has a positive impact on groups/community relations, the EIA should make this explicit, to enable the outcomes to be monitored over its lifespan.
- Where there is a positive impact on particular groups, does this mean there could be an adverse impact on others, and if so can this be justified? - e.g. Are there other existing or planned initiatives which redress this?
- It may not be possible to provide detailed answers to some of these questions at the start of the initiative. The EIA may identify a lack of relevant data, and that data-gathering is a specific action required to inform the initiative as it develops, and also to form part of a continuing evaluation and review process.
- It is envisaged that it will be rare for full impact assessments to be required. Usually, where there are particular problems identified in the screening stage, it is envisaged that changing the approach at this stage, and/or setting up a monitoring/evaluation system to review a policy's impact over time will tackle the problem.

ⁱ MAPPA: Multi-agency public protection arrangements in place to ensure the successful management of violent and sexual offenders

ⁱⁱ MARAC: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases