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# Allocations

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Author: Service Improvement & Policy Team

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

As a Social Landlord OHG recognises meeting, as far as possible, the demand for and supply of housing to our potential and existing residents is the key requirements of its role. It is also important that it manages its housing stock fairly in line with the requirements of the Tenant Services Authority and related regulations and legislation. OHG has prepared this policy after consultation with residents. This policy should be considered in conjunction with the OHG **Allocations Procedure**.

## 2 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

### Aims:

- to meet the level of customer service and operational management indicated in the Audit commissions 'Excellence' standard.

### Objectives:

- to supply properties that meet the diverse needs of its potential and existing residents.
- to ensure allocations are made effectively and fairly to the right client at the right time.
- to provide the Allocations and Lettings Department with the resources it requires, both physical and monetary to deliver a fast and efficient service to housing applicants.
- to work in partnership with a variety of organisations, institutions and agencies.

## 3 POLICY STATEMENT

OHG is working in partnership with a variety of other organisations to provide the most effective assistance for applicants who are seeking to move into an area with properties managed by OHG or transfer within its property portfolio. OHG will respond to requests for succession, assignment and mutual exchange according to legislation and best practice, the OHG **Tenancy Management Policy** and **Tenancy Management Procedure** will detail the specific approach.

In letting its properties OHG will take into account the following:

- creating sustainable communities
- prioritising applicants considered to be in the greatest housing need
- providing a service that is equally accessible to all
- making the best use of existing housing stock
- giving applicants choice in their housing options and decisions
- being responsive to local issues
- minimising void turn around time
- complying with the Regulatory Code and current legislation



### 3.1 Allocations and Minors

OHG only offers housing to anyone 18 years or over. OHG’s One Support, a separate organisation within OHG dedicated to providing support to Vulnerable and Young Adults, provides accommodation and support to applicants of 16 years and above.

### 3.2 Nominations

OHG does not hold its own waiting lists for new tenants. Applicants will be accepted on the basis of current nominations arrangements set up with local authorities and London Boroughs. OHG’s stock is dispersed over a variety of local authorities and it also works in partnership with many RSL’s. Properties are advertised on the relevant local authority or London Borough Choice based letting website. The nomination agreements will depend on the location of the stock. Any remaining void properties, where applicable, are directed for:

- Transfer
- Asset Management for decant properties.

### 3.3 Toynbee & Community Nomination Agreements

Within the Toynbee and Community business of One Housing Group, the following nomination rights apply:

Property Type	Nomination Agreement
1 bed properties and studios	50%
2 bed + properties	75%
New Developments	(subject to nomination agreements with individual boroughs and sub regions)

In addition to these nomination agreements, Westminster and Enfield London Boroughs have 75% nomination rights on all void properties, irrespective of the type and size.

### 3.4 Island Homes Nomination Agreements

Within Island Homes, there is a 100% nomination agreement with Tower Hamlets. This agreement, however, allows some nominations to be directed through the IH overcrowding policy. All void properties are advertised with Tower Hamlets.

### 3.5 Agency Managed Properties

Where OHG own a block, building or property that is managed by another agency, it would be that agencies Allocations & lettings policy that would apply. If the said managing agent wanted to take legal action against a tenant, however, they must seek approval from OHG. The inter-agency relationships are set out in the agreed Management Agreements as authorised by OHG Board.

### 3.6 Application Process

Applications must be made through the relevant local authority or London Borough Choice based letting website. All applicants nominated to OHG will be kept informed of the progress of their application and as such they will receive a summary leaflet explaining the allocations policy, have their application acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt of the application and be advised within 10 working days of receipt of all information of their banding award and also their right of appeal.

Through the Choice based letting scheme, the highest pointed nominee will be offered the property (usually as part of a short list) and will be expected to make a decision at the time of viewing. Upon refusal the next nominee in the short list will be offered the property. If all nominees offered a particular property refuse it, over three property offer sessions, then the property will be officially classed as hard to let.

**Access to Information / Supply of Information** - Applicants who lie or knowingly provide false information or withhold relevant information will have their application form cancelled. Where a tenancy has been granted and it then comes to OHG's attention that the applicant had knowingly provided false information or withheld relevant information then OHG will take action to recover possession of the property.

**Security of Tenure** - All new residents will be offered an Assured ShortHold Tenancy (starter/probationary tenancy) that will convert to an Assured Tenancy after a twelve month period subject to the resident meeting the terms of their tenancy agreement.

**Nominees who are considered inappropriate** - for the specific vacancy will be advised that they cannot be considered for that particular property and a reason will be given. Each case will be considered on its merits.

### 3.7 Transfers & Mutual Exchange

OHG maintain a transfer list for existing tenants who qualify to apply to move to an alternative property within its own stock. All requests are directed to the appropriate web based Choice Based Lettings (CBL) site. Existing tenants can also conduct a Mutual Exchange with other tenants of OHG or with residents of another RSL or local authority. The following tenants are not eligible to carry out a transfer or a mutual exchange:

- tenants with rent arrears
- tenants with shorthold tenancy agreements
- tenants against which OHG are seeking legal action
- tenants of Island Homes can not apply to transfer as 100% of the associations stock is nomination via Tower Hamlets Local Authority.

Residents interested in conducting a mutual exchange can register with Homeswapper, the UK's largest community of social housing tenants looking to swap homes. More details can be found at the [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk).

The transfer list is checked and updated every 12 months. All transfer requests are banded within the following categories:

Banding		Description
40%	Band 1	Emergency (Management Transfers)
30%	Band 2	Urgent (medical etc)
20%	Band 3	Identified need
10%	Band 4	Non-Specific need

Please refer to the OHG [Allocations Procedure](#) and the [Moving Home](#) section of the website for further information on the management of Transfers and Mutual Exchanges.

### 3.8 Right to Acquire

If a resident lives in a property built since 1<sup>st</sup> April 1997 with funds from the Housing Corporation, they have the right to acquire (buy) it at a discount. This right goes with the property, so if the resident moves into an older they will not have the right to acquire it. Residents should contact their housing officer to find out if their home qualifies.

## 4 EXCLUSIONS

OHG will not operate a separate exclusions policy. Instead OHG will work with LA's to ensure that the Common Housing Registers takes into account the potential difficulties of allocating properties to people who may put the sustainability of tenancies or estates at risk due to unsocial behaviour or un-met support needs.

### 4.1 Allocations to Staff Members and their Families

Staff members and their families are entitled to apply for a OHG property in the same way as all other people. However prior to an allocation being made consideration will be given to the legal obligations contained in Schedule 1 of the 1996 Housing Act. Senior staff will ensure that appropriate checks are made and ultimately the Board will be asked to agree allocations before they are made.

## 5 SENSITIVE LETTINGS

While all allocations need to be managed with sensitivity, it is anticipated that some allocations will be extremely sensitive due to the behaviour of previous residents or the specific circumstances of the immediate neighbours. From time to time OHG will need to make particularly sensitive lettings in order to ensure that future tenancies are sustainable and the local estate has an opportunity to recover from previous difficulties. When a property is identified as in need of a sensitive let then the reasons for this will be clearly stated in the nomination request process. OHG will refuse nominations that do not meet with requirements and will work with LA's to ensure the reasons for sensitivity are known

and accepted. Some sensitive lettings will take place through the transfer process or through external schemes. In both cases the sensitivity issues will be paramount and additional points or priority will be given to applicants who meet the sensitivity requirements.

## **6 LOCAL LETTINGS PLANS**

From time to time OHG will consider the need for specific and time limited local arrangements which will aim to address very specific local / estate problems. Such arrangements will be part of a wider community action plan which will aim to address specific problems such as anti-social behaviour, high tenancy turn over rates or high void rates. As and when a local area or estate exhibits problems which could be addressed by varying the allocations policy then OHG will consult with local residents and agree specific plans with the LA with an aim of removing the estate from the normal lettings policy for a period of time. Regular reviews will take place.

## **7 HARD TO LET PROPERTIES**

Void properties will be defined as hard to let if they meet any of the descriptions below:

- The property has been refused on three different viewing sessions
- No suitable nominees can be identified from the Common Housing Register
- The property is of a similar type and in a similar location to another property that was defined as hard to let in the previous six months

When a property is identified as hard to let consideration will be given to the best way of allocating the property based on knowledge of local demand and previous experience. The relevant LA will be contacted to enable them to consider applicants who have requested similar properties to see if they would be willing to be considered for the vacancy. Local adverts, discussions with other housing associations and LA's and any external schemes within the area will all be considered, together with other approaches such as allowing under occupation. If there is little prospect of the accommodation being accepted consideration will be given to the future use of the property with decommissioning and development potential being considered.

## **8 NEW BUILD HOMEBUY (SHARED OWNERSHIP)**

It is OHG's policy that for prospective residents to register and apply for one of OHG's Low Cost Home Ownership schemes they will need to register and apply with Housing Options (an on-line gateway to affordable housing in London). Here they will find all the homes that are available to buy through New Build HomeBuy (formerly known as shared ownership), a 'part buy/part rent' opportunity and other affordable housing schemes. Residents can create a free User Account and fill in an application form. Residents can view all properties across London by clicking on property search; this can also be done without setting up a user account. Once the prospective residents have filled in their application form outlining their favourite searches, OHG will send them weekly updates on homes that match their needs.

### **8.1 Resale**

Shared ownership residents are able to sell their home; this is known as a resale or an assignment. Residents can sell their shared ownership home soon as they become the legal owner but their lease may specify a period during which any profit made may have to be shared with the Housing Association. Under the terms of their lease, if they own less than 100% of their home they must advise OHG in writing of their intention to sell their property.

The Sales and Marketing team will then assist them through the process to sell their home. A valuation must be carried out by an independent RICS qualified valuer with the valuation accompanied with at least two comparable property values within the locality of their home. This is to determine the current open market value of their property and will be the price the property will be marketed at.

As the leaseholder, the residents are required to meet the valuation costs and any other legal fees incurred in connection with selling their home this includes the Home Information Pack. Under the terms of their lease, OHG will market their home for 8 weeks from assignment to find a suitable buyer at a fee normally based on 1% of the equity value of their home plus VAT.

If in the unlikely event that OHG have been unsuccessful in finding a buyer for the resident's home in the 8 weeks, they will have the opportunity to instruct an Estate Agent to market their property paying their fee for the services they provide or alternatively they may continue marketing their home through OHG. Resale properties were originally sold under New Build HomeBuy (shared ownership) and therefore any potential purchaser must meet the affordable home requirements of Housing Options for a resale home.

## **9 KEY WORKERS (INTERMEDIATE RENTALS)**

OHG's Key Worker scheme, also known as intermediate rentals, is designed to assist the recruitment and retention of frontline workers, generally from the health and education sectors in London and Berkshire. OHG Key Worker tenancies will be Assured Shorthold Tenancies and priority will be given to those on lower incomes who cannot afford to buy or secure a mortgage for an affordable home. There will normally also be a service charge to cover items such as buildings insurance, management and cleaning of communal areas. Sales & Marketing within OHG do the initial allocation and letting and then City Style living undertake the management responsibility thereon. Key-workers are assessed for suitability by OHG Sales & Marketing at the time of credit checks being undertaken.

### **9.1 How to Apply**

This scheme is for key workers applying for key worker funded homes. Even a key worker in the UK on a temporary worker permit, may be eligible for an intermediate rent home.

When agreed with the local LA, the temporary lettings policy will be terminated and the normal Lettings Policy and process will be reinstated. Any plans should be drafted in conjunction with the appropriate LA or London Borough in order to ensure that the market is reflected in the allocation.

## 10 GARAGES

OHG will offer and let its garages and parking spaces using the following criteria:

- if you are top of the list in terms of waiting time & do not already rent a garage you will be offered the next one available
- if you are top of the list in terms of waiting time & already rent 1 or more garages & there are no other applicants eligible & waiting you will be offered next one available
- residents with a disability will take priority, regardless of waiting time, on production of evidence to support the disability
- if a transfer is required from your existing garage because major works must be carried out upon it

(There must be another empty garage available in the same area or close by which we will consider letting to you on the condition that once repairs are complete you will transfer back to your original garage)

- all offers are subject to the applicant not owing any other housing related arrears or debts i.e. current or former house & garage arrears or court costs
- applicants must produce a log book and valid Insurance certificate in their own names.

All new garage tenants are required to pay their garage rent account by Direct Debit and are expected to maintain this method of payment throughout the tenancy term. OHG will allow applicants to register for garages at 16 years of age in areas of low demand.

Except where directed by a senior Manager, a garage will only be let for domestic use. OHG will encourage garages to be let for commercial purposes subject to the normal planning requirements and to the satisfaction of the committee that there will be no likelihood of nuisance

## 11 LEGISLATION, REGULATION & GUIDANCE

Government legislation has an impact on how OHG can implement its Allocations policy. Listed below are the key Acts to be acknowledged.

- Housing Act 1996 (Schedule 1)
- Housing Act 1985 (S.106)
- Housing Corporation Regulatory Code 2002
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (S.30)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Race Relations Act 1976 (S.21)

## 12 CONFIDENTIALITY

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998, all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential. This includes:

- anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a resident, client, applicant, staff or committee member
- sensitive organisational information.

Officers will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the resident concerned, unless:

- OHG is required to by law
- the information is necessary for the protection of children

## 13 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

OHG recognises the needs of a diverse population and always acts within the scope of its own **Equality and Diversity Policy**, the Human Rights Act 1998, The Disability Discrimination Act, and Race Relations Act. OHG works closely with its partners to ensure it has a clear understanding of its resident community with clear regularly updated service user profiles. The Performance Information Team is responsible for recording, analysing and monitoring information on ethnicity, vulnerability and disability.

OHG believes it has taken steps which will prevent direct or indirect acts of discrimination when carrying out the allocations process. These steps include:

- identifying the housing needs of all sections of the community and reflecting them in the group's housing programme
- identifying support needs and ensuring they are recorded and acted upon by lettings officers who, where necessary, signpost to the appropriate support service for assistance
- making decisions about allocations in a weekly meeting attended by lettings staff
- insisting all applicants complete a Residents Profile Form to enable OHG to monitor the number of applicants, the number of offers made and who OHG re-house each year
- providing information to applicants in a range of languages and formats to match their requirements
- identifying the diverse communities which are accessing the register but not getting accommodation

## **14 MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

The delivery of this policy will be monitored using a number of techniques. OHG staff will monitor all lettings using the CORE system (continuous recording IT system developed by the Housing Corporation). The overall success of the policy will be judged using a mixture of indicators which will measure overall sustainability of estates together with indicators which measure the success and speed of internal processes. Some of these indicators will be reported to Board and some will be monitored within the service and used to inform continuous improvement within the allocations process. A number of these indicators will have targets associated with them which will be reassessed on an annual basis.

The following indicators will be used:

- sustainability measures
- tenancy turnover rates- these will be measured on an area by area basis on at least a six monthly basis and reported to the service manager
- termination reasons- these will be monitored on a tenancy by tenancy basis and reported to the responsible manager
- percentage of turnarounds meeting target (28 days)
- Resident Satisfaction with the Letting Process- this will be measured on a tenancy by tenancy basis and reported to the Board
- Allocation process measures- number of lettings made per area, per BME group and whether resulting from a transfer or nomination request
- void turn around time
- rent loss due to voids
- number of hard to let properties

## **15 HEALTH & SAFETY**

This policy will be carried out in compliance with the relevant statutory health and safety requirements and regulations.