



**Blackpool Coastal
Housing**

Local Lettings Policy

July 2017

INSPIRING PEOPLE TO BUILD **BETTER COMMUNITIES**

Document Information

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Amendment Record

Date	Issue No.	Section/Page	Details of Change	Authorised By:

Amendment Notes

- Documents at draft status are to use letter designations to denote issue status: a, b, c etc.
- Documents at full issue status are to use number designations to denote issue status after full revision: 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, etc.
- For an amendment to a full issue document you are to use number designation to denote issue status: 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, etc.
- On full issue the draft amendment record should be deleted from the above table.
- Notification of the amendment must be sent to the person maintaining the Central Register.

Introduction

Each local authority has a responsibility to make best use of its scarce housing resources and ensure that the majority of social rented homes are let to those who fit into a “reasonable preference” category because they have a recognised housing need. But there is also flexibility in how housing resources can be used, with opportunities to provide homes for others who may not have defined needs but who do still wish to benefit from the security and affordability of a socially rented home. This also helps to promote balanced communities in areas of social housing and reduce concentrations of intense deprivation.

Despite the intrinsic advantages of social housing, there are some particular homes that are especially unattractive because of their locations or design. The easy availability of alternative homes in the private rented sector means that it can be hard to find tenants for these homes. The approach to lettings therefore needs to be flexible to ration access to most socially rented homes for which there is high demand, but at the same time enable easy access to homes that are less popular.

In areas where there is a lot of social rented housing, there are some significant concentrations of deprivation. In some cases exacerbated by unpopular house types or a poor quality environment, this leads to a culture of low expectations, poor educational achievement, and social marginalisation. In areas of very high deprivation we need to assist residents to access opportunities for training and employment, but also encourage more balance in the make-up of the local community through the allocation of social rented homes. For example, we can help develop a balance between people who are in work and those dependent on benefits, a balance between households at different stages in life, and a balance between people who are physically able and people who require long term care.

Improving the balance of homes and residents in inner areas of Blackpool continues to be the town’s biggest housing priority. While the inner areas generally have low levels of social housing, some more new homes for affordable rent are being introduced to the area as part of physical regeneration initiatives. In these areas it is especially important to allocate social homes to help strengthen local communities and reduce transience and deprivation, with less emphasis on letting only to those with the greatest needs.

A growing population of older people, and a high number of people with long term health problems, make it especially important that we use effectively those properties that are suitable for people with limited mobility.

The demand for specialist sheltered accommodation for older adults needs to be kept under review to ensure that older people continue to get the accommodation and support that they are looking for.

Legal Considerations

The Housing Act 1996 (amended) details the requirements to award reasonable preference to defined groups of applicants. Section 167 of the Act allows for the allocation of properties to particular applicants whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories. This is the statutory basis for LLPs. The statutory guidance document “Fair and Flexible” (December 2009) clearly encourages the use of LLPs and advises that such policies can be used in a variety of ways. The guidance proposes that organisations should consider how LLPs can assist in providing mixed sustainable communities and the preference given to those economically active or volunteering within communities.

The Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (June 2012) - Section 166A(6)(b) of the 1996 Act enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories, provided that overall the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of s.166A(3). This is the statutory basis for so-called ‘local lettings policies’ which may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives.

Purpose

Whereas the Fylde Coast Consistent Assessment Policy sets out who is eligible to join the housing register and how priority is awarded to applicants looking for social housing, this Local Lettings Policy applies only to Council housing in Blackpool and sets out where there are changes to the default position that homes are allocated to those in the greatest priority that have been waiting for the longest time. It is a strategic tool that enables lettings made by Blackpool Coastal Housing to be linked to wider strategic issues and ensures best use is made of the stock available.

The Local Lettings Policy allows for a more flexible approach in allocating homes to meet specific local issues and help create sustainable communities. For example, a Local Lettings Policy may:

- Offer a choice and affordable product for those in employment;
- Help establish a balanced new community where new accommodation has been built;
- Age restrict certain properties to promote social cohesion;
- Introduce additional criteria that aim to reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour in areas that have existing high levels of anti-social behaviour;
- Help new residents blend in smoothly with the existing community.

Blackpool Council and Blackpool Coastal Housing commit to ensuring that this Local Lettings Plan will be non-discriminatory and will be kept under review by monitoring the impact on access to Council homes by different groups.

Where homes are subject to particular lettings arrangements as a result of this Local Lettings Policy this will be clearly displayed on property adverts.

Specific Policies

In order to respond to strategic priorities and ensure that specialist accommodation is targeted at those with those needs, there are a number of lettings policies that should apply to some particular types of homes:

1. For new the development at Queens Park, priority should be given to people who are economically active, including those in voluntary work or have a specified exceptional provision, (as defined in Appendix 3 of the Fylde Coast Consistent Assessment Policy). This may include people who are able to demonstrate they are unable to work due to disability, age or gender.

This should apply to both first lettings and subsequent re-letting at Queens Park. The properties should be advertised with priority being given to people who are economically active. Of bidders who are economically active, those with the highest priority band who have been waiting the longest time should be offered the property. Only if there are no bids from people who are economically active should others be considered.

The inner area is characterised by high levels of deprivation and renting to low income groups. This policy enables the tenant profile for popular new developments in the inner area to contribute to more balanced communities.

2. Where sheltered housing flats have general needs flats above them, the upper floor accommodation will be allocated to applicants over 40 with no known substance misuse issues or a history of anti-social behaviour.

3. For all sheltered housing schemes, lettings are restricted to people who are over 55 years of age or for younger people with illness, disability or vulnerability. To be eligible for sheltered housing, prospective residents should have no known substance misuse issues or a history of anti-social behaviour.

Applying the same lifestyle restriction to residents of sheltered schemes as that applying to residents in close proximity should help ensure a quiet and safe environment for all residents.

4. For all sheltered housing schemes, a target is in place for the maximum proportion of sheltered homes that should be occupied by younger people with illness, disability or vulnerability. This is 17% of the whole sheltered housing stock, to help limit the use of the sheltered housing stock by younger people to the current level. Performance against the target across the whole stock will be monitored over time, but it should not be used in individual lettings decisions to prevent access by individuals under 55 who meet the eligibility criteria.

The new target is to ensure that the principle that sheltered housing is primarily for older people is protected. It is expected that the proportion of under 55s living in sheltered housing will reduce over time as more suitable alternatives are found for them. It is currently not possible to restrict sheltered housing to older people entirely because of a lack of alternative housing options for vulnerable younger people. It is unnecessary to make further restrictions because experience shows that small numbers of appropriate lettings to younger people is not detrimental to older residents.

5. At sheltered housing schemes at Horsebridge Road and Cherry Tree Road, the lettings policy will change so that:
 - Vacancies at Horsebridge Road will no longer be let as sheltered housing. To manage the transition period all new lettings will go to applicants over 40 with no substance misuse issues or known history of anti-social behaviour. This will be reviewed when/if there are no longer any original sheltered tenants living in the scheme.
 - At Cherry Tree Road, the sheltered housing scheme will be broadened so that vacancies in the upper floor flats above the existing scheme will start to be let as sheltered housing.

This will increase the number of schemes within BCH's stock that provide small community settings that are entirely for sheltered tenants, now including Aysgarth Court, Cherry Tree and Dunsop Court. Horsebridge Road sheltered scheme is relatively unpopular with applicants and has been reduced in size through partial re-development. This change will mean that it eventually ceases to operate as a sheltered housing scheme.

6. Where a tenant is living on a sheltered scheme in an upper floor flat but develops physical difficulties, resulting in a requirement for adaptations, consideration will be given to an internal move on site so they remain within their established community. This will be facilitated by a direct match and subject to availability.
7. Applicants who are economically active including those in voluntary work or have a specified exceptional provision (as defined in Appendix 3 of the Fylde Coast Consistent Assessment Policy) may be given priority in areas where there are issues identified via the Blackpool Coastal Housing's Neighbourhood Management System. Any such proposal will be agreed in partnership between the Council and Blackpool Coastal Housing.

Definitions

No history of substance abuse – applicants must have abstained from using drug or alcohol during the last 12 months.

No history of ASB – applicants who have received a number of warnings or served notice within the last 5 years.

Scope

This Policy covers all Blackpool Council's Housing stock.

Where a location of properties has been identified via Neighbourhub and other performance management indicators, a Local Lettings policy will be developed based on the specific needs of that community and agreed with the Council.

Responsibility

Blackpool Council is responsible for setting the policies for the allocation of Council housing stock.

The Director of Operations, Blackpool Coastal Housing is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

The Housing Manger – Lettings, Blackpool Coastal Housing is responsible for the operational implementation of the policy.

Sustainability

Blackpool Council and BCH strive to create vibrant sustainable communities. These values are present during the implementation of the Local Lettings Policy. The Lettings Team carries out a number of actions to meet this objective.

- Affordability
- Risk assessments
- Support referrals e.g. Financial advice,
- Furniture referrals

Monitoring

Information to be included on Lettings scorecard detailing:

- % of people living in sheltered housing who are under 55 – target 18%
- % of ASB cases within sheltered stock – target 11%

Associated Documents

MyHomeChoiceFyldeCoast Consistent Assessment Policy
Procedural Local Lettings documents