

# Lettings Policy

Last reviewed: May 2025

## Document Control Sheet

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<b>Approved by (Board/EB/Committee)</b>	<b>EB</b>
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<b>Policy author</b>	<b>Head of Lettings</b>
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## Version Control

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reviewed by (name and title)</b>	<b>New version number</b>	<b>Summary of changes</b>
May 2025	Shannice James-McFee (Head of Lettings)	2.0	New Policy replacing both former organisation's previous Lettings Policies.

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## **1. Scope**

This policy applies to all customers who live in properties owned or managed by Sovereign Network Group (SNG).

It sets out how we let our homes, ensuring consistency and accountability across all areas of our lettings process. It covers how we advertise our homes, process applications and allocate tenancies.

The policy applies to the following tenures:

- General Needs
- Housing for Older People
- Supported Housing
- Intermediate Market Rent
- Private Market Rent
- London Living Rent
- Smart Rent (also known as Build to Rent)

It doesn't include the following tenures:

- Key Worker accommodation
- Shared Ownership or Leasehold homes
- Garages

## **2. Purpose and objectives**

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and consistent framework for how SNG lets its homes. It helps ensure that we meet all legal and regulatory requirements, while offering good-quality, and affordable homes to people in housing need.

This policy supports our commitment to building thriving communities where people want to live and feel proud to call home.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- help customers access homes that meet their housing need
- ensure our eligibility criteria and allocations practices are fair, transparent, and consistently applied

- support our local authority partners in delivering their strategic housing priorities and building sustainable communities
- let our homes responsibly to make the best and most effective use of SNG's housing stock
- promote and sustain diverse, inclusive, and vibrant communities
- provide a range of housing options to meet different income levels and household circumstances.

### **3. Policy statement**

At Sovereign Network Group (SNG), we believe everyone deserves a good-quality, affordable home in a neighbourhood they can feel proud of. This Lettings Policy sets out clearly and transparently how we achieve that, guiding us to allocate our homes fairly, responsibly, and effectively.

We take our responsibilities seriously, working creatively and collaboratively with our customers, colleagues, local authorities, and other partners to build sustainable communities. Our approach supports customers from the moment they apply, ensuring we understand their housing needs and any vulnerabilities, so we can provide the right support from day one.

By letting our homes responsibly and efficiently, this policy helps us fulfil our purpose: providing good homes as the foundation for a better life.

### **4. Our approach to letting homes**

SNG is committed to a fair and transparent approach to letting our homes. Our aim is to balance the needs of individual customers with our responsibility to make the best use of our housing stock and support sustainable communities.

When letting our homes we will:

- aim to make our process as efficient and as easy as possible for our customers to follow
- take a digital-first approach, encouraging customers who can self-serve to use our online platform for forms, documents, information, and signatures
- support customers who are not able to self-serve by offering alternative ways to access our services. This may include help over the phone, face-to-face support, paper forms, or assistance with using digital tools

- tailor our approach to meet the needs of the customer, including working with support agencies and advocates
- maximise the use of our local authority nomination agreements to ensure our homes are let quickly and to those in greatest need
- let our homes as quickly as possible to avoid loss of rent, vandalism or squatting, choosing the most appropriate advertising channel to do so
- give priority to SNG customers who we've asked to move because their home is being disposed of or redeveloped
- encourage and support our existing residents to move to smaller homes if their current one is larger than they need or can afford
- enable mutual exchanges and provide free subscription for all qualifying existing residents to a national home swap service
- provide support to help residents find suitable alternative housing if they've succeeded to a home that's larger than they need
- work with other organisations to offer a wide range of housing options to customers considering a move
- aim to match adapted homes to customers in need of the adaptations
- work with local authorities and other stakeholders to develop local lettings plans (LLPs) to improve access to housing and create sustainable communities
- prevent lettings that would result in overcrowding or under-occupation, ensuring each home is suitable for the household's size and needs in line with household size and need, following the bedroom entitlement criteria set out in the Bedroom Entitlement appendix to this policy
- only let a home to an employee or their relatives, and Board members or their relatives, in line with SNG's Conflict and Declaration of Interest Policy.

#### **4.1. Advertising and seeking nominations**

For our Social Rent and Affordable Rent homes we will:

- advertise and let the majority of our homes to people who have bid via Choice Based Lettings or been nominated by local authorities and other statutory agencies
- choose the most appropriate advertising channel to let our homes where we have nomination rights
- highlight any property attributes, such as the right to Shared Ownership
- let our homes in line with the Town and Country Planning Act and clearly advertise any Section 106 requirements

- offer housing for older people to those who have reached the set minimum age for a particular scheme or who have a disability or support need
- consider offering a home to young people aged 16-17 years. If an offer is made, we will issue a Deed of Trust and require a suitable trustee until the young person reaches 18 years of age.

For our Market Rent, Intermediate Market Rent, London Living Rent and Smart rent, properties we will:

- advertise and let our properties through a range of advertising channels
- let each home to the most suitable applicant, ensuring that both right to rent and financial assessment criteria are fully met and the property is affordable to the applicant
- let homes to those over the age of 18 only
- ensure applicants meet any applicable income threshold requirements and, where relevant, satisfy local connection criteria.

#### **4.2. Bedroom Entitlement**

When letting our homes we allocate according to bedroom need to make best use of our housing stock and avoid under occupying. We apply the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) size criteria to bedroom need.

The LHA size criteria allow one bedroom for each of the following:

- adult couple
- any other adult (aged 16 or over)
- two children of the same sex under the age of 16
- two children under 10 regardless of sex
- any other child (other than a foster child or child whose main home is elsewhere).

#### **4.3. Exceptional Circumstances**

In some circumstances, SNG may approve lettings outside of the standard process. Any such decisions will be made at the discretion of a Head of Service, with the reasons for the decision clearly documented.

We apply clear criteria to determine the size of home offered to each household type—for example, a single person, couple, or family. Further details can be found in the Bedroom Entitlement appendix to this policy.

SNG also reserves the right to refuse an application where there are valid grounds to do so. The specific circumstances under which we may refuse a letting are outlined in the Lettings Grounds for Refusal appendix.

#### **4.4. Offering a Tenancy**

Before we make an offer of a tenancy, we will do the following things:

- we'll ask for information about you and everyone in your household, including your income and finances. This helps us make sure the home is affordable for you as our customer and that it meets the needs of your household
- make sure the home is suitable for the customer and the household meets the lettings criteria
- provide an opportunity to view the home, this may be a virtual viewing, which could include photographs, a video walkthrough and room measurements before expecting an applicant to accept our offer
- ask you to provide proof of identity for everyone who will be living in the home. This is usually photo ID like a passport or driving licence
- take and keep a photograph of new customers when they move in. This helps us prevent tenancy fraud and make sure the home is lived in by the people on the tenancy agreement
- carry out a right to rent check for everyone in your household who is aged 18 or over. This is a legal requirement to confirm that each adult has the right to rent a home in the UK
- make sure every home is let in a safe, clean condition and meets our Empty Home Standard
- offer tenancies in line with our Tenancy Policy
- explain the rights and responsibilities of being a SNG resident so you know what to expect from us and what we expect from you
- require an advance rent payment before you sign the tenancy agreement. This is in line with the terms of your tenancy and helps cover your first rent payment
- if you're not receiving full Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit, we may carry out an independent income assessment, based on the Standard Financial Statement, to provide a clear and consistent view of your household finances. This not only helps us assess whether the rent and any service charges are affordable but can



also identify whether you may be entitled to additional benefits or financial support. If the assessment indicates the tenancy is likely to be unsustainable, we may decide not to proceed with the offer, in line with our Grounds for Refusal.

#### **4.5. Support and Advice**

For all our customers we will:

- provide advice and guidance on accessing housing, including support with the application and bidding process when needed
- provide detailed information on becoming a SNG customer and holding a tenancy with us, the service we offer and the support available
- offer translation services to support customers who do not speak English as their first language, as well as alternative formats such as large print and audio versions for those who have difficulties with written English or other communication needs
- work closely with applicants, customers and partner agencies to identify any vulnerability or support needs and ensure support packages are in place.

#### **5. Compliance**

All staff involved in Lettings at SNG are required to read, understand and comply with this policy. Understanding will be confirmed upon induction and reinforced through annual policy refreshers. Managers will monitor compliance and promptly address any instances of non-adherence. Assurance on compliance and the effectiveness of this policy will be reported regularly to the various Customer committees and forums, as appropriate: Customer and Neighbourhood's Leadership Team (CNLT), Chief Customer Officer Leadership Team (CCOLT), Customer Influence Panel, and/ or Executive Board.

#### **6. Responsibilities**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Head of Lettings	Ensuring the Lettings Policy remains up to date, compliant with legislation, and aligned with regulatory requirements. Oversees the delivery of the policy and ensures all staff involved in the lettings process follow procedures consistently and efficiently.
Lettings Support Team	Responsible for advertising available homes correctly and promptly, managing property listings across platforms, maintaining accurate records.

Role	Responsibility
Lettings Officers	Responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the policy, including matching prospective customers to suitable homes, carrying out eligibility checks, signing up new tenants, and providing clear advice and guidance throughout the lettings process. Ensures fair and transparent allocation in line with policy.
Specialist Housing Team	Responsible for advertising and allocating specialist housing in line with this policy.
Customer Income Advisor	When needed, they work with customers to help them manage their finances and create a budget to make sure the home is affordable. They can also help apply for grants or other financial support from local organisations.

## 7. Equality, diversity and inclusion

- We will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against anyone based on any protected characteristics, including those set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- At SNG, our commitment is to make sure that no individual or group experiences unfair, discriminatory, or prejudicial treatment in recruitment, pay or promotions, housing, or any other service we provide, such as lettings, tenancy advice, repairs or rent collection.
- SNG strives to be an open, inclusive, and diverse organisation where everyone has a right to be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. As an organisation we value the diversity and talents of all individuals and the richness that brings to our culture.
- We understand the varying needs of our residents and communities and promote equality of opportunity in employment and service provision.
- We deliver appropriate, accessible, and flexible services, being tolerant, understanding and not judging others or their lifestyle choices. We stand up to and challenge prejudice, discrimination, and harassment in all its forms.

## 8. Related documents

- Tenancy Agreements
- Tenancy Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Succession Policy
- Affordable Home Ownership Policy
- Domestic Violence

- Transfer Policy
- Decant Policy
- Empty Home Standard

## **9. Legislation and regulation**

- The legislation listed in this policy is not intended to cover all legislation applicable to this policy. To comply with clause 1.1 of the Regulator of Social Housing's Governance and Financial Viability Standard, which requires adherence to all relevant law, SNG will take reasonable measures to ensure compliance with all applicable legislation by reviewing policies and procedures and amending them as appropriate. Any queries relating to the applicable legislation should be directed to the policy owner.
  - Housing Acts 1985, 1988, and 1996
  - Equality Act 2010
  - Immigration Act 2014 and 2016
  - Localism Act 2011
  - Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England
  - Human Rights Act 1998
  - Social Housing Regulation Act 2023
  - Anti-social behaviour crime and policing act 2014
  - Consumer Standards 2024

## **10. Review**

- This document will be reviewed every 2 years, or sooner if significant changes occur in the relevant legal or operational landscape.
- These criteria may include relevance to current business practices, legal compliance, alignment with organisational goals, effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes, and feedback from stakeholders.