

Lettings policy

Last updated August
2021

Review August 2023

Lettings policy

Why we have this policy

We provide good quality affordable homes to people in need, in communities where people want to live.

We take into account the needs and aspirations of existing and potential residents and offer a range of housing products to meet their requirements.

We aim to let our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.

We work closely with local authorities and contribute to supporting them to meet their strategic housing needs.

This policy sets out how we will let our social rent and Affordable Rent homes. It doesn't include key worker, market rent, intermediate rent, shared ownership, leasehold or garages.

Our approach to letting homes

When letting our homes, we aim to make our process as efficient and as easy as possible for our customers to follow.

We operate a digital first approach and will encourage those customers who can self-serve to follow this approach and complete forms, supply documents, access information and sign forms digitally via our online platform.

We will provide more support where needed and tailor our approach to meet the needs of the customer.

When letting our homes, we aim to:

- Maximise the use of our nomination agreements to make the best use of our homes.
- 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 Sovereign residents who we've asked to move because their home is being disposed of or redeveloped.
- Encourage, support and prioritise our existing residents to move to smaller homes if their current one is larger than they need or can afford.
- Support residents to move to an alternative property for social, medical or welfare reasons.
- Enable mutual exchanges and provide free subscription for all existing residents to a national home swap service.
- Offer suitable alternative accommodation if a resident has succeeded to a home larger than they need.
- Work with other organisations to offer a wide range of housing options to residents considering a move.
- Aim to match adapted homes to residents 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.

Advertising and seeking nominations

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.
- 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.

Employees and relatives

We will:

- Only let a home to an employee or their relatives, and Board members or their relatives, in line with Sovereign's Conflict and Declaration of Interest Policy.

Existing Sovereign residents

We will:

- Support transfer requests if the rent account is up to date and no other debt is owed to us, the home meets our Empty Home Standard at the time of the move and no other tenancy conditions have been broken.
- Where we manage an internal transfer list, provide support and guidance to residents who want to apply.

Points to note

In exceptional circumstances, we may agree lettings that are outside the normal lettings process. This will be at the discretion of an operational director and the reasons for the decision recorded.

We have clear criteria around the size of home we will offer each type of household, for example a single person, a couple or a family. For more information see appendix to this policy: 'Bedroom Entitlement'.

We reserve the right to refuse an application. We have clear grounds for refusal. For more information see appendix to this policy: 'Lettings Grounds for Refusal'.

Reviews

If a resident feels we haven't kept to our Lettings Policy, they can ask us to review our decision.

A manager will carry out this review and we'll only do this once.

Offering a tenancy

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

- Collect applicant and financial information to allow us to assess the needs of the whole household and check they can afford to pay the rent and living costs for the home.
- Make sure the home is suitable for them and the household meets our lettings criteria, including affordability.
- Provide an opportunity to view the home, this may be a virtual viewing, which will include photographs, a video walkthrough and room measurements before expecting an applicant to accept our offer.
- Ask for proof and verify the identification of all applicants, preferably photographic ID such as a passport or driving license.
- Take and keep a photograph of new residents. This will be used to tackle tenancy fraud and make sure our homes continue to be lived in by the people named on the tenancy agreement.
- 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 Sovereign resident.
- Require an advance payment of rent in line with the rent terms within the tenancy agreement.

Advice and support

We will:

- Provide applicants for our homes with advice and guidance on accessing housing, including support with the application and bidding process when needed.
- Provide detailed information on becoming a Sovereign resident and holding a tenancy with us, the services we offer and the support available.
- Offer translation services to applicants who do not speak English as their first language and others who have difficulties with written English.
- Work closely with applicants and partner agencies to identify any vulnerability or support needs and ensure support packages are in place.

Our commitment to residents and employees

We'll be transparent about our responsibilities around equality.

We'll treat everyone fairly and respectfully, regardless of their:

- age
- gender
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- disability
- religion
- race
- nationality
- ethnicity or national origin.

We'll make sure our services and workplaces are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

We'll take seriously any concerns that we've not acted in a fair way, dealing with them as quickly as we can.