

Sovereign Lettings policy

April 2024
Review April 2025

Lettings policy

Scope

This policy applies to all customers who reside in properties owned or managed by Sovereign Housing Association Limited and/or Sovereign Living Limited only.

Customers who reside in properties owned or managed by Sovereign Network Homes and its subsidiaries should refer to the applicable policy¹.

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 and affordable rent homes and our market and intermediate market rent homes. It doesn't include key worker, shared ownership leasehold or garages.

¹ Sovereign Housing Association and Network Homes merged on 1 October 2023 to form Sovereign Network Group (SNG). This Policy is not a merged Policy and applies to customers previously associated with Sovereign Housing Association. Integration will take place between October 2023 and April 2025 at which point a merged Policy will come into effect. Sovereign Network Homes and its subsidiaries will follow the applicable Policy.

'Sovereign Network Group' is the trading name of Sovereign Housing Association Limited, a charitable Registered Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, registered with the Financial Conduct Authority No. 7448 and with the Regulator for Social Housing No. 4837. (Registered office: Sovereign House, Basing View, Basingstoke, RG21 4FA.)

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, including working with support agencies and advocates.

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 qualifying 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

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 and Intermediate Market 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.

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 and meet our Transfer Policy Banding Criteria.

Points to note

In exceptional circumstances, we may agree lettings that are outside the normal lettings process. This will be at the discretion of a Head of Service 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 customer 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. We won't hold a property while we carry out the review.

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 the 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

At Sovereign, 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.

Sovereign 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.

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