



LETTINGS POLICY

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Executive Summary:
<p>Our Lettings Policy sets out how we will allocate our homes. The policy aims to provide sustainable and safe communities by working in partnership with Rochdale Borough Council to help with their statutory duties. The policy also details how we will offer properties in cases where an urgent move is needed, and what our criteria is for this.</p>

Policy Grouping/Directorate(s)	Customer and Communities	
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Notes:		

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's approach to allocating and letting our homes. Our objective is to provide the right home, to the right person, at the right time and with the right support in place. At the heart of this is a customer's ability to successfully take on the responsibility of a tenancy, including all the costs of running a home.

2 Context

- 2.1 This policy describes how we make our empty homes available and who they will be let to. These include applicants who bid under the Council's 'Choice Based Lettings' system, applicants who apply directly, and current RBH customers who require an urgent move.
- 2.2 This policy covers the letting of properties by RBH. It does not cover the letting of shared ownership and 'rent to buy' homes. These are subject to a separate policy.

3 Aims & Objectives

- 3.1 The aims of the policy are:

- To deliver a fair, transparent, accessible allocations and lettings service to all customers.
- To create and support mixed, balanced and sustainable communities working with specialist support and housing agencies when required.
- Work closely with Rochdale Borough Council to assist them in fulfilling their statutory duties to secure accommodation for people in housing need.
- Have regard to our responsibilities under the Equalities Act; assess monitor and take mitigating actions to ensure that our policy and procedures do not detrimentally impact on the housing opportunities of customers.

- 3.2 The policy fits with the mutual values of RBH:

Responsibility - We take responsibility for, where possible, meeting the needs of people by providing the right home, to the right person, at the right time and with the right support.

Equity - This policy will help ensure fairness and transparency when allocating and letting our homes.

Democracy - This approach has been developed in partnership with members through the relevant consultancy groups and consensus with the elected representative board/body.

Pioneering - This policy supports a forward-thinking approach to allocating homes by involving new ideas and methods to ensure efficient, inclusive and tailored service delivery.

Collaboration - We will work with teams across RBH and RBC to deliver this policy.

4 Policy Statement

4.1 Housing Need

We have an agreed percentage of homes that we will let without advertising via the Council's choice-based lettings system. These homes can be let to any applicants, and we will allocate based on housing need, for example, where people must move from their home because it is unfit, being demolished or similar; people negatively impacted by welfare reform measures, or people whose medical condition or social circumstances (such as domestic abuse, hate crime or harassment) makes it impossible to remain in their current home.

4.2 Affordable Tenancies

We will act responsibly to ensure we are providing the right home, to the right person, at the right time and with the right support in place.

Allocation decisions will be made considering applicants' individual circumstances to ensure customers have the best possible opportunity to succeed in their tenancies:

- We will undertake a pre-tenancy assessment with all customers, including existing customers, to understand their ability to successfully sustain a tenancy with or without support.
- We will work with partners to access support services for customers where the pre-tenancy assessment indicates this is required to successfully maintain a tenancy. We may decide to not allocate a home where a prospective tenant is unable to demonstrate they can sustain the tenancy and/or afford to live in the home. We will offer appropriate assistance and signpost applicants to agencies that can help with their individual circumstances.

4.3 Stable Communities and Sustainable Tenancies

When allocating tenancies, we will seek to make the best use of our homes and to create the best conditions for stable communities and sustainable tenancies.

4.4 Direct Lets

We recognise that sometimes there are good management reasons for giving existing customers the opportunity to transfer. We may agree to move an existing RBH tenant using our percentage of available homes if they:

- Are under-occupying.
- Are the victim of a hate crime or domestic violence and at risk of serious harm.
- Are occupying a home with specific facilities or adaptations or support services that are no longer required.
- Have a medical need for a transfer to a lower floor and wish to remain at the same development.

- Have asked to move, and we believe that a move would resolve a serious management issue, such as a neighbour dispute.
- Must be moved either permanently or temporarily to enable emergency, major repairs or re-development to their home.

In these cases, we will consider offering a vacancy directly to an existing tenant (Direct Let).

We will not normally consider transferring customers who have outstanding arrears of rent or are otherwise in breach of their conditions of tenancy, including the conditions requiring the tenant to look after their home. However, each case will be assessed to identify exceptional reasons to support a discretionary move where tenancy breaches are identified.

4.5 **Eligibility**

As a landlord with charitable objectives, people housed by us under this policy will be primarily those who are unable to house themselves in the private sector. We will let our homes to:

- People who have a specific housing need, for example because they are in need of special support due to disability, age or risk of abuse or neglect.
- People whose personal circumstances make it difficult to access owner occupation or private renting (e.g., job insecurity, self-employment).
- People whose financial circumstances mean that they cannot access owner occupation or private renting; we will use our financial assessment procedure to establish eligibility.

4.6 **Exclusions**

We have a duty of care to all colleagues, residents, and local communities. To meet that duty, we will ask about the history and needs of potential customers as part of the pre-tenancy assessment. We may not house people for the following reasons:

Anti-Social Behaviour

- Where anti-social behaviour caused by the applicant or a member of their household has resulted in formal action including: start of possession proceedings; the serving of a notice seeking possession; a possession order; an injunction; an anti-social behaviour order; a conviction relating to anti-social behaviour. We will review this on a case-by-case basis but no period of exclusion will exceed two years from the initial housing application being made.
- Ongoing anti-social behaviour which is being investigated by us or another organisation.
- Specific threats of violence or harm have been made by the applicant or a household member against any RBH colleague. We will review this on a case-by-case basis but no period of exclusion will exceed two years from the threats being made.

- Damage, caused deliberately or through neglect to a property, requiring extensive repair.

Debt and Affordability

- Where the pre-tenancy assessment demonstrates that the circumstances of the applicant would be significantly worsened by accepting the property.
- Customers applying with any housing-related debt, either to RBH or other social landlord, will not normally be considered for an RBH property.

Special Circumstances

- Where a property has been identified for a sensitive let and the applicant's circumstances do not meet the requirements of the sensitive let.
- Where an applicant does not fulfil local lettings criteria that apply.

4.7 Applicants with Support Needs

RBH will only offer tenancies where identified support needs of applicants can be met and providing that the applicant is committed to accepting the necessary support, including financial support.

We will not offer a tenancy where customers require a level/type of support to live independently, and that type of support is unavailable at point of offer.

Older Persons

We own and manage housing (Independent Living Schemes - ILS) which have specific design features making them suitable for older people. We will let these homes only to people who:

- Are aged 55 and over (or aged 50 for some specifically designated individual homes).

We may consider applicants aged between 50 and 55 for schemes who meet the following criteria:

- Have a physical or mental disability.
- Have a specific need for support services that cannot be delivered to an equivalent standard in general needs accommodation.

Applicants under the age of 50 could only be considered under exceptional circumstances and must meet the criteria above.

RBH Bungalows

Applicants who require level access and the use of aids and adaptations will be considered for bungalows. There is no age restriction.

Extra Care

In addition to our older persons housing, we also manage an Extra Care Scheme (Hare Hill) for older people requiring on site personal care as well as support.

4.8 Tenancy Fraud

We will take the necessary steps to ensure that opportunities for tenancy fraud are minimised by securing sufficient identification from the tenant(s) at the start of the tenancy.

In addition, credit reference checks may be undertaken prior to an offer being made as part of the pre-tenancy assessment. A poor credit rating will not in itself prevent the offer of a home.

4.9 Fairness and Transparency

To ensure fairness and transparency when letting our homes, we will not award a tenancy to persons in the following categories:

- Board member or employee of RBH without appropriate permissions.
- A close relative of a person within (a) again without appropriate permissions.

Exceptions may be made only in accordance with, and subject to the controls of, our Anti-Fraud and Anti-Bribery policies.

4.10 Letting Homes against Household Size

Generally, the criteria for letting properties in a way that best matches household size with size of home, form part of the allocation criteria agreed under local Choice Based lettings policies.

We will consider under-occupation by applicants on an individual case basis, ensuring they are able to demonstrate their ability to afford all the rent. Cases where we may consider this include (but are not limited to):

- Where the home is in low demand.
- Where a Local Lettings Policy is in place which permits under occupation to promote scheme sustainability.
- Where a suitable household requiring accommodation of the size available is not identified.
- In exceptional circumstances to promote the welfare of the household e.g., where a disabled person requires internal storage space for equipment or an occasional bedroom for a carer.

4.11 Local Lettings Plans

Local Lettings Plans (LLPs) will be considered in consultation with the Council, in response to specific community sustainment issues and on any new build scheme and maybe used to combat social and economic deprivation with specific blocks of flats or densely occupied areas, particularly in areas of high anti-social behaviour. We will work with the Council to apply specific criteria when advertising through Choice Based Lettings schemes e.g., age restrictions or banding/grouping restrictions. Alternatively, we may consider changing the tenure mix, if appropriate, to deliver a more mixed community, leading to greater levels of sustainability. On new developments, especially mixed tenure, we may look to implement a Local Lettings Policy which aims to provide a balanced community.

4.12 Hare Hill Allocations

Letting homes at Hare Hill will be agreed by the Hare Hill Allocations Panel. Referral to the Allocations Panel will be made via Adult Care Service, or self-referral, following a Care Act Assessment. Decisions of the panel will be made in line with the Hare Hill Allocations Pathway. (Appendix 2)

4.13 Appeals

Appeals relating to the Council's housing register prioritisation will be managed by the housing register appeal process.

Appeals relating to our decisions (for example, direct lets, exclusions, vulnerable applicants above) will be managed internally using our lettings appeals process.

4.14 Rent in Advance

New customers will be expected to pay rent in advance from the start of their tenancy in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement.

5 Monitoring

5.1 Customers have engaged in reviewing this policy and its effectiveness through the Representative Body and 'Have your say' events.

5.2 Lettings performance is reported weekly to Head of Service, quarterly to RBC and is benchmarked annually.

6 Review

6.1 All RBH strategies, policies, service standards and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' and comply with all relevant legislation and statutory regulations.

6.2 This policy will go through the full policy approval process every 3 years and will undergo a desktop review annually. This is to ensure that it is fit for purpose and complies with all relevant and statutory regulations.

7 Links with Other RBH Documents

7.1 This policy links to the following policies and strategies:

- Rent & Service Charge Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Corporate Strategy
- RBH Recovery Plan

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Limited is a charitable community benefit society. FCA register number 31452R.

Registered Office: Unique Enterprise Centre, Belfield Road, Rochdale, OL16 2UP
Registered as a provider of social housing. RSH register number: 4607

Appendix 1

The type and size of a home offered to applicants will depend on the size, age and household make-up of the family. The following table shows how homes are offered to a range of household types to ensure best use of stock, though individual circumstances of the applicant may be taken into account for a different home.

Type of Home	Household Type
Houses and Maisonettes	Families with children
Flats above ground floor level with internal communal areas	All adult households. Households with uncaged pets are not accepted.
Flats without internal communal areas, and flats with internal communal areas but which are on the ground floor	All households
Studios / Bedsits	Single people and couples
Bungalows	Households requiring ground floor accommodation
Adapted properties (including wheelchair accessible housing)	Households requiring the adaptations
Independent Living Schemes and older people's accommodation	Single people and couples where all household members meet the age criteria or have a need for support

Appendix 2

Hare Hill Allocations Panel Pathways

