

Horton Housing Association

GROUP SELECTION AND ALLOCATION POLICY

1.0. Introduction

- 1.1. The mission of Horton Housing Association (HHA) is to help people to live the best life they can through the provision of high quality housing, training and support. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that HHA selects its clients and allocates its housing, support and other services in a fair, equal and consistent manner to those whose needs are greatest and consistent with the aims and objectives of any particular scheme.

HHA is the parent body of Horton Housing Group and this Policy applies to all entities within the Group.

- HHA will retain final control over the selection and allocation of services.¹
 - Each scheme will have a clear policy for selecting clients and allocating services to them.
 - Fair access will be given to all sections of the community and assessment procedures will ensure that services are offered to those who are in greatest need and most vulnerable.
 - The policy for selection and allocation will be in writing, publicised and widely circulated to avoid any indirect discriminatory practice.
 - The allocation of services will be monitored and reviewed to ensure that services are responsive to changing needs and priorities.
- 1.2. One of HHA's subsidiaries, Chartford Housing Limited, is registered with the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) so this Policy aims to comply with the Tenancy Standard (2012), as well as the legal, good practice and quality requirements that apply to the Group as a whole.

2.0. Legal and Good Practice Requirements

- 2.1. The Equality Act 2010 replaced the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act, simplifying the law and making it easier for people to comply with.
- 2.2. The Act affords protection from discrimination on the grounds of nine protected characteristics:
- Age
 - Disability
 - Gender reassignment

¹ Unless, exceptionally, contract terms dictate otherwise.

- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

2.3. HHA aims to provide equal, fair access and provision of services to all applicants and clients. We aim to eradicate discrimination and unfairness on any grounds, including the above.

2.4. The HCA's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017 (paragraphs 1.3.1 and 2.3.1) states that Registered Providers must:

- a) treat all tenants with fairness and respect;
- b) demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to equality strands and tenants with additional support needs; and
- c) demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.

2.5. Regulated services will take these requirements into consideration within their selection and allocation policies and procedures.

3.0. Definitions

3.1. Where discrimination against any person or group is referred to, it shall be deemed potential unfair discrimination and/or illegal. Seven types of discrimination are covered by statute:

- **Direct discrimination:** discrimination because of a protected characteristic.
- **Associative discrimination: direct** discrimination against someone because they are associated with another person with a protected characteristic. (This includes carers of disabled people and elderly relatives, who can claim they were treated unfairly because of duties that had to be carried out at home relating to their care work. It also covers discrimination against someone because, for example, their partner is from another country).
- **Indirect discrimination:** when you have a rule or policy that applies to everyone but disadvantages a person with a protected characteristic.
- **Harassment:** behaviour deemed offensive by the recipient. A person can claim they find something offensive even when it is not directed at them.
- **Harassment by a third party:** employers are potentially liable for the harassment of staff or customers by people they do not directly employ, such as a contractor.
- **Victimisation:** discrimination against someone because they made or supported a complaint under Equality Act legislation.

- **Discrimination by perception:** direct discrimination against someone because others think they have a protected characteristic (even if they do not).

4.0. The Use of Targets

- 4.1. HHA's Single Equality Scheme addresses this. In certain circumstances, the need for specific targets, aimed at providing services to particular groups, based on the level of identified need, may be adopted by the organisation.

5.0. Principles

- 5.1. HHA recognises that fair and equal allocation of services depends upon:

- assessment of housing, support and other needs and aspirations across all sections of the community
- ensuring that lettings make the best use of available housing
- all staff being aware of unconscious bias
- adequate monitoring and review of referral and allocation procedures
- ensuring that the choice of referral agencies is not in itself discriminatory
- ensuring that publicity materials are distributed to organisations representing minorities and under-represented groups
- clients being consulted and having input into leaflets and other publicity materials
- publicising the organisation's Equality and Diversity Policy Statement and all relevant selection criteria in appropriate languages and formats
- ensuring that selection criteria do not indirectly discriminate by placing unnecessary conditions on prospective referrals
- making sure that practice is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to identify and combat any discriminatory trends.

6.0. Information for Referral Agencies and Prospective Clients

- 6.1. In order that referral agencies, prospective clients and other relevant parties are informed about specific schemes, each service will produce a Service Description and a Selection and Allocation Policy detailing the:

- scheme's aim and objectives
- scheme's commitment to equality and diversity
- services provided
- intended length of stay/support
- application process
- selection criteria
- basis for assessing priority need

- timescale for decisions
- requirement to provide any supplementary information

6.2. Expected length of stay or support is detailed in each scheme's Service Description, Selection and Allocation Policy. HHA's services are usually 'short term', which can range from three months to two years, depending on the contract. Most of HHA's accommodation-based services are provided on a six-month assured shorthold tenancy, which can be reviewed and extended if necessary. Licence agreements are used in services provided to fulfil a local authority statutory homeless duty, and length of stay is usually determined in the context of homelessness legislation.

6.3. Service Descriptions are available in large print and various languages on request. Our website has audio and translation tools that can be used on the pages containing key details about services. Staff explain their services to applicants and those newly accepted as clients. In some services, staff are able to speak languages other than English and/or interpreters can be used if necessary.

British Sign Language interpreters can be made available for assessments and interpreting information for deaf applicants.

7.0. Selection Criteria

7.1. Selection criteria for schemes will address the following issues:

7.2. *Aims and objectives*

- who the scheme is for
- the types of support, intensive housing management or other services provided
- the type of accommodation, floating support or other support type available
- equality and diversity statement

7.3. *Who is eligible?*

- any specific requirements (e.g. age, gender, dependency or health problems)
- the type or level of support need
- current status, for example: homeless, single, under Care Programme Approach (CPA)²

² <https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/care-programme-approach.aspx>

7.4. *Who is excluded?*

- reasons for not offering the service (there should be no blanket policy - an assessment of risk should be made for each individual)
- there is a regular review of those evicted or excluded from the service

7.5. *How to refer*

- how to apply
- who to contact
- what assessment and/or interview needs to be carried out
- whether self-referrals are accepted (generally they are accepted, unless the contract specifies otherwise)
- details of referral agencies

7.6. *The allocation process*

- how this will be conducted
- application forms
- interview arrangements
- involvement of other agencies

7.7. *Communication*

- how contact will be made at each stage
- how decisions will be communicated

8.0. The Referral / Application Form

8.1. The Referral / Application Form will:

- assess the level of housing and support need of the applicant
- include details of any information and/or communication needs, in line with the Accessible Information Standard³
- examine a person's medical history and/or risk history only in so far as is relevant to the scheme
- allow for monitoring of the organisation's performance against all protected characteristics
- cover areas which have been highlighted for refusal of services

³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/implementation-guidance.pdf> [Accessed 03.01.18].

- include an explanation of how the information collected will be used and who will have access to it
- ensure that explicit permission is sought from the referral/applicant to record, store, process and share the information they provide, in line with data protection regulations.

9.0. Interviewing/Assessing Referrals

- 9.1. Where possible all referrals should be interviewed by at least two members of staff.⁴ Interviews should follow a standard format and assess the person against objective criteria. (See Eligibility Criteria and Needs and Risk Assessment/Interview Form).
- 9.2. When arranging appointments, consideration should be given to the time of day, venue and any communication needs. Wherever possible applicants should be sent reminders of assessments/interviews by text or phone the day before the appointment. This will also serve as a check that the applicant still wants the service.
- 9.3. Applicants with reading or communication difficulties, known to support staff, will be contacted by telephone or other appropriate contact method prior to any assessment to ensure that they have understood their letter and/or letters will be explained.
- 9.4. Staff should seek to put applicants at ease and offer reassurance about the process and what will happen afterwards.
- 9.5. The interview should give the applicant additional information about the scheme and allow them to judge whether it suits their needs or not. If at all possible, prospective clients should be given the chance to view accommodation-based schemes or venue-based services.
- 9.6. In accommodation schemes, if for any reason an applicant cannot attend the scheme for assessment/interview, arrangements should be made to meet them at an alternative venue such as their current accommodation, referrer's office, hospital or prison.
- 9.7. The applicant should always be told how and when they will be notified of the decision.
- 9.8. Support staff/housing officers should always ensure that applicants are aware that they have been referred and discuss this with the referrer and applicant where appropriate.

10.0. Appeals

- 10.1. Any person who is refused services must be informed of their right of appeal.

⁴ One can be from another agency, where joint working is taking place.

10.2. Appeals will be heard in accordance with the Client Appeals Procedure.

11.0. Prioritising

- 11.1. Those referrals in greatest need of the service will receive priority. This is usually defined in terms of vulnerability or risk for support services but some schemes are also designed to support balanced and sustainable communities for those with a more advanced level of tenancy-readiness, so this may also be taken into account. Because of the nature of our services, vulnerability can be related to age, disability, illness or other factors that put an individual at risk and in need of a particular service.
- 11.2. Where appropriate, a waiting list, indicating the level of need for the service, will be maintained by individual schemes.
- 11.3. Where schemes hold a waiting list, staff will maintain contact with applicants on the list (at least two monthly or other frequency by prior arrangement with the applicant) in order to ensure that the service is still needed and also to reassure the applicant of their position on the list. This contact can be by phone, letter or text where appropriate.
- 11.4. All schemes are encouraged to hold regular drop-in sessions where applicants can be updated on their position on the waiting list and/or provided with immediate interventions if required.
- 11.5. Where the above is not possible, schemes should contact stakeholders, referrers and other agencies or have a presence in their offices and drop-ins in order to update applicants on their position on the waiting list.

12.0. Commencing Service

12.1. Once an offer has been made and accepted then staff should:-

- Explain support planning and/or the housing management process (or other process relevant to the service type)
- Issue and explain the:
 - Support Agreement (where applicable); and
 - Client Handbook / Welcome Pack
- Additionally, in accommodation-based services, staff should:
 - explain the terms and conditions of the occupancy agreement
 - identify welfare benefit entitlement and gain necessary information from the client
 - explain house rules
 - explain the move-on/resettlement planning process
 - provide information on local services/amenities

- 12.2. If clients transfer between schemes, there will be a formal handover procedure, including client files, and clients will be fully consulted and involved at every stage, as set out in the 'Fair Exit and Move On Policy' (Section 8 – Internal Referrals).

13.0. Monitoring

- 13.1. Monitoring and review of the selection and allocation process will be implemented to identify potential areas of discrimination, assess changing patterns of need and inform future strategies.
- 13.2. Supported CORE lettings information will be completed for each new letting in supported housing schemes owned by Registered Providers.
- 13.3. As part of their annual business planning, schemes will set targets address gaps or weaknesses. Performance will be monitored against these.