

## Horton Housing Association

### GROUP ACCESS AND ALLOCATIONS 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 health and well-being support.

1.2. We assist all our Local Authority (LA) providers to meet their statutory duty in relation to the allocation of homes

1.3. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that:

- People have access to its housing, support and other services in a fair, equal and consistent manner.
- Access is for those whose needs are greatest and consistent with the aims and objectives of any particular scheme.
- Access is clear and simple, so that service provision is fully utilised maximising the benefits to the people who need help and communities we work from.

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

- HHA will agree final decision over access to its services and allocation of accommodation.<sup>1</sup> This will ensure alignment with the specific support and housing needs of the referral and the service criteria
- Each scheme will have a clear access policy
- Fair access will be given to all sections of the community
- Assessment procedures will ensure that services are offered to those who meet set criteria and who are in greatest need and facing the toughest problems.
- The access policies will be in writing and available upon request to avoid any indirect discriminatory practice.
- Access to, and allocation of services, will be monitored and reviewed to ensure that services are responsive to changing needs and priorities.

1.5. One of HHA's subsidiaries, Chartford Housing Limited, is registered with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). This Policy aims to comply with regulatory framework and other relevant legislation including the Equalities Act 2010. It also, follows 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 gives protection from discrimination on the grounds of nine protected characteristics:

- Age

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<sup>1</sup> Unless, exceptionally, contract terms dictate otherwise e.g. single source referral services.

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

2.2. HHA aims to provide equal, fair access and inclusive provision of services to all applicants and the people we support. We aim to eradicate discrimination and unfairness on any grounds, including the above.

2.3. The RSH Tenancy, Influence and Accountability Standard 2024 (DRAFT) states that **Registered Providers must:**

- treat all tenants with fairness and respect (R1.1.1).
- take action to deliver fair access to, and equitable outcomes of, housing and landlord services for all tenants (R1.2.1).
- use relevant information and data to:
  - a) understand the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers, and additional support needs; and
  - b) assess whether all tenants have fair access to, and equitable outcomes of, housing and landlord services (S2.1.1).
- ensure that landlord services are accessible, and that the accessibility is publicised to tenants. This includes supporting tenants and prospective tenants to use online landlord services if required (S2.1.3).
- allow tenants and prospective tenants to be supported by a representative or advocate in interactions about landlord services. (S2.1.4)

Additionally:

- Registered providers' housing and neighbourhood policies must be fair, reasonable, accessible and transparent. Where relevant, policies should set out decision-making criteria and appeals processes (S2.3.4).

2.4. All services will consider these requirements within their access 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 colleagues 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 Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan addresses this. In certain circumstances, the need for specific targets, aimed at providing services to people with specific protected characteristics, based on the level of identified need, may be adopted by the organisation.

#### 5.0. Principles

- 5.1. HHA recognises that fair, equal and inclusive access to services depends upon:
- accurate 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 e.g. level access or adapted accommodation is allocated to a person who requires this type of property
  - all colleagues being appropriately trained in equality, diversity and inclusion, access and assessment processes, understanding various support needs, issues and difficulties of the people requiring housing and well-being support
  - adequate monitoring and review of referral and access procedures
  - ensuring that the choice of referral agencies is not in itself discriminatory through monitoring referrals and key characteristics
  - people who we support being consulted and involved, on promotional material design, access procedures, and the support and accommodation types offered

- publicising the organisation's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement and all relevant access criteria,
- ensuring the availability of translation services and other accessible formats for all key information
- ensuring that access criteria is clear and does not indirectly discriminate by placing unnecessary conditions on prospective referrals
- the right to appeal a decision, for example where access is declined, right to a review by a senior person who was not previously involved (see point 10 below)
- 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 the Prospective People We Support**

6.1. In order that referral agencies, prospective people who may access our services and other relevant parties are informed about specific schemes, each service will produce a Service Description that provides a Guide to the Service and How to Access It, detailing the:

- An introduction to Horton and the Scheme
- What the service offers
- How the service works
- Types of support provided
- Intended length of stay/support
- Service access criteria
- Referral and application process
- Timescale for decisions
- The rights of people accessing the service
- What is expected of people accessing our services or living in our accommodation
- If there are any requirements to provide supplementary information
- Horton's commitment to equality, diversity and Inclusion and the Together with Tenants Charter

6.2. Expected length of stay or support:

- HHA's services are usually 'short term', which can range from three months to two years, depending on the contract/source of funding.
- 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 providing shared facilities or where accommodation is provided to fulfil a local authority statutory homeless duty.
- In the case of statutory duty, length of stay is usually determined in the context of homelessness legislation.

6.3. Communication requirements:

- Accessible formats and language translation of key information are available on request from our Communications Team.

- Our website has translation tools that can be used on the pages containing key details about services.
- Colleagues explain their services to applicants and people who are accepted for support.
- In some services, colleagues are able to speak languages other than English 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. Access Criteria

7.1. Access criteria for schemes will address the following:

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
- the amenities the accommodation provides, e.g. number of rooms, shared facilities, available support times, on or off site.

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)<sup>2</sup>

7.4. *Reasons for not offering a service?*

Each scheme will describe services they do not offer or are unable to provide, for example:

- Most schemes do not offer personal/health related care such as bathing, cleaning, shopping, and medicine administration.
- Some of our accommodation may not meet a person's accessibility needs e.g. ground floor access.
- Scheme resources are generally unable to provide intensive levels of support such as, two colleagues required for all visits or 24-hours on site support.

They will also describe any safety or risk considerations for the person applying and those already living in the accommodation, that need to be taken into account. Such as:

- Safeguarding and abuse concerns
- Families and children access
- Location or other restrictions from the courts
- Maintaining balanced and sustainable communities within shared accommodation units.

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

However:

- There is no blanket exclusion policy, and an assessment of support requirements and risk will be made for each individual.
- The reasons for not offering a service, will be shared and discussed with the individual. They will also be helped to find alternative support.
- There is a regular review of individuals who have been 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
- that advocates can apply on behalf the person requiring the service

#### 7.6. *The access and allocation process*

- how this will be conducted
- application forms
- interview arrangements/informal conversational approach
- involvement of other agencies

#### 7.7. *Communication*

- how we will contact you at each stage
- how decisions will be communicated
- how to let us know any preferred communication method
- how to tell us who you would like us to communicate with e.g. via referral agency, social worker, family, friend, or other advocate

### **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 Standard<sup>3</sup>
- 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

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/implementation-guidance.pdf> [Accessed 24.01.24].

- cover areas which have been highlighted for refusal of services
- 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 GDPR and data protection regulations.

## **9.0. Interviewing/Assessing Referrals**

- 9.1. Where possible all referrals should be interviewed by at least two HHA colleagues from the relevant service.<sup>4</sup> Interviews should follow a standard format and assess the person against objective criteria. (See Eligibility Criteria and Strength Assessment/Interview Form).
- 9.2. If a referral is a result of a contracted single source referral arrangement, applicants are usually accepted directly into service and an assessment is booked. However, there may still be exceptions where there is, for example, a safety/risk-related reason for rejecting an applicant prior to meeting them or even after formally assessing them.
- 9.3. When arranging appointments for assessment, 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.
- 9.4. Applicants with reading or communication difficulties, made known to colleagues, 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.
- 9.5. Colleagues should seek to put applicants at ease and offer reassurance about the process and what will happen afterwards.
- 9.6. The interview should give the applicant additional information about the scheme and allow them to judge whether the service suits their needs or not. If at all possible, applicants should be given the chance to view accommodation-based schemes or venue-based services prior to their acceptance.
- 9.7. 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. Where it may not be possible to meet in person, alternative arrangements may be considered such as meeting remotely via video link.
- 9.8. The applicant should always be told how and when they will be notified of the decision.
- 9.9. Support workers/housing officers should always ensure that applicants are aware that they have been referred and discuss this with the referrer and applicant where appropriate.

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<sup>4</sup> One can be from another agency, where joint working is taking place.

## **10.0. Appeals**

- 10.1. Where the service applied for is not suitable for the person, they must be informed of their right of appeal. HHA colleagues will offer to provide support with this process.
- 10.2. Appeals will be heard in accordance with HHA's 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 those at highest risk or facing the toughest problems, 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. Additionally, where a placement could put the applicant at further risk will also be taken into account.
- 11.2. Because of the nature of our services, 'need' or 'problems' can be related to age, disability, illness or other factors that put an individual at risk and in need of a particular service.
- 11.3. Where appropriate, a waiting list, indicating the level of need for the service, will be maintained by individual schemes.
- 11.4. Where schemes hold a waiting list, colleagues will maintain contact with applicants (*at least two monthly or other frequency by prior arrangement with the applicant*). This is to ensure that the service is still needed and to reassure the applicant of their position on the list. This contact can be by phone, letter or text as appropriate.
- 11.5. All schemes are encouraged to provide regular contact with applicants to ensure that they are updated on their position on the waiting list and/or provided with immediate interventions if required.
- 11.6. Where the above is not possible, schemes should contact stakeholders, referrers and other agencies or have a presence in their offices or designated meeting spaces/ 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 the person has accepted the offer, colleagues will:-
  - 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
    - Handbook/Welcome Pack
  - In accommodation-based services, colleagues will also:
    - explain the terms and conditions of the occupancy agreement
    - identify welfare benefit entitlement and gain necessary information from the person in receipt of support
    - explain the expectations of the use of shared or communal facilities and areas



- complete the Induction Checklist
- provide the relevant tenancy related documents
- explain the move-on/resettlement planning process
- provide information on local services/amenities

12.2. If a person we are supporting transfers between schemes, there will be a formal handover procedure, including relevant files and information and the person receiving support will be fully consulted and involved at every stage, as set out in the Data Protection Policy and 'Fair Exit and Move On Policy' (Section 8 – Internal Referrals).

### **13.0. Monitoring**

- 13.1. Monitoring and review of the access 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.