

Allocations and Referral Policy

Introduction

At Salvation Army Housing Association (saha), we provide a range of accommodation for people in housing need, including:

- General needs accommodation for families, couples and single
- Foyer accommodation for young single people
- Supported housing
- Sheltered housing for people over the age of 55 years old
- Temporary housing for homeless people
- Private Sector Rentals

We work in partnership with local authorities and a number of other referral agents to offer the right accommodation to people who need it. Many of our homes are now let via council nominations or Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes, and therefore operate within their rules. CBL schemes require applicants to register with the scheme for housing and bid for properties of their choice. We retain waiting lists in certain areas where there is low demand for our housing or for our sheltered housing. In all cases we take care to ensure that we allocate property in accordance with this policy.

In areas where saha “Lifehouses” are situated, we often make allocations direct to residents who are ready to move to independent living. In these circumstances we do not utilise the local Choice Based Letting system. This practice avoids the silting up of temporary accommodation and therefore assists local authorities to help meet their role in tackling homelessness and meeting local housing need. Allocation of property in this manner will be made in accordance with local nomination agreements.

This policy includes the letting of all our homes, including existing residents who wish to exchange or transfer to another home. It links with the following saha policies:

- Needs and Risk Assessment Policy.
- Support Policy.
- Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Data Protection Policy.
- Safeguarding Adults and Children’s Policy.
- Foyer Allocation Criteria.
- Sheltered Housing Allocation Criteria.
- Supported Housing Allocation Criteria.
- Local Lettings Policy.
- Priority Banding System.
- Occupancy Agreement Policy.
- Void Policy

Objectives

- This policy aims to achieve the following objectives:
- **Work in partnership** with Local Authorities to meet housing need of current and future residents.
- Offer **choice** to residents in the location and type of their future home.
- Help deliver **sustainable communities**
- Make the **best use** of our housing.
- Ensure that allocations are **transparently and fairly** made.
- **Minimise empty homes**, and **maximise access** to those in need of accommodation.
- **Meet Right to Rent Requirements**

Definitions

Allocation - is the process by which we select the applicant who will be offered a tenancy.

Nomination - is the process used by some local authorities to refer applicants to housing organisations based on their housing need.

CBL Schemes - are generally operated by local authorities and each will operate differently. It is a way of letting all social housing in an area in a consistent way. The common feature is that once someone has registered that they are looking for housing they will have to 'bid' (register their interest) for properties that become available, rather than waiting to be offered one. Based on an individual's circumstances they will be awarded a 'priority rating' and this will act as the deciding factor if several people 'bid' for the same property.

Sustainable Communities - are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

Lifehouse - is a home that provides temporary accommodation for people who are homeless.

Right to Rent Checks – The legal duty that saha, as a landlord, must complete before letting a property to ensure all adults who will reside at the property in which they may be allocated have the 'right to rent'.

Residents Responsibilities

This policy applies to applicants who are not currently residents and our residents who wish to transfer or exchange. All applicants, whether residents or not, are required to:

- Be honest on their application forms and at their interviews in order that we are able to investigate support needs appropriately.
- Work with us in providing details to all agencies required to be involved in the allocations process and to attend meetings/appointments when agreed.

Staff Responsibilities

The Director of Housing Services is responsible for the overall implementation of the Allocations policy and Head of Housing North & South will have direct responsibility in ensuring that the policy is implemented effectively in their areas. All officers dealing with allocations are responsible for ensuring that:

- The property is advertised in the most appropriate place for letting as soon as is practicable

- Local lettings plans and allocations agreements are adhered to.
- All of the information on the letting is recorded accurately and appropriately to demonstrate a transparent process and allow for future scrutiny.
- The applicant is kept informed appropriately at every stage of the process and decisions are clearly explained.
- The applicant is given a right of appeal if they feel they have not been fairly treated or disagree with a reason for them having been refused accommodation.

Statement

Tackling homelessness and meeting housing need

We have a responsibility to ensure that the people most in need of our accommodation and services are able to access them. We aim to provide a fair and transparent lettings process to meet the needs of new and existing customers whilst contributing to, and building, sustainable communities.

We aim to provide an efficient lettings service that meets our aims, the needs of our customers and the communities we serve. This means we will give customers clear and relevant advice to help them meet their needs and we aim to minimise the time that homes remain empty in order to assist those in housing need and minimise loss of income to the association.

We will work in partnership with local authorities to help meet their role in tackling homelessness and meeting local housing need and at the same time making the best use of available housing. We will embed the prevention of homelessness and tenancy sustainment within our key housing management policies.

We will participate and co-operate with any local authority that has, or wishes to introduce, a choice based lettings scheme or a common housing register for social housing tenancies in their area where it is in the interests of our customers. The only exception to this practice may be where the Association takes direct referrals from our agency managed services, to provide permanent move-on accommodation to residents living in temporary accommodation, and we can demonstrate clear value for money. In negotiating with local authority partners about choice based lettings schemes, we will always try to reserve some vacancies for our internal transfers and make sure that vulnerable residents are given every opportunity to take advantage of the scheme.

We will support our customers as far as possible to choose where they want to live and we aim to match the right person with the right property first time.

Who will saha house?

We will consider applications from the following:

- **Nominations from local authorities** - our nominations agreements with local authorities offer between 50 and 100% of lettings to people nominated by local councils the percentage will depend on the local authority.
- **Nominations from approved and publicised referral agencies** – saha maintains a register of agencies that can refer customers to specific properties. **Internal transfers** - in most areas saha has retained the right to allocate up to 50% of our empty properties. In these areas we hold a waiting list for people wishing to transfer

- to another saha property. Where a local authority has 100% nomination rights and a CBL scheme, customers will need to join the CBL scheme.
- **Decants** – tenants of saha who need to move temporarily from their home, usually due to major works, fire or flood.
- **Mutual exchanges** – we ensure our assured and secure tenants understand their right to exchange, we have joined Homeswapper, a national exchange service to help our residents find someone to exchange with.
- **Move-on** – we provide temporary agency managed services and shared accommodation helping people live independently, often for the first time.
- **Referrals** – some designated properties are part of initiatives or arrangements where referrals are made for vacancies. These referrals come from agreed referral agencies referring people whom the scheme aims to assist.
- **Direct lettings** - where local authorities are unable to provide nominations to some of our sheltered schemes and low demand properties we advertise and take direct applications.

Eligibility criteria for a saha home

We operate eligibility criteria for our homes to ensure a fair and transparent system for assessing all applicants for housing, whether through a nomination, referral, move-on, transfer, exchange or direct letting. The criteria will generally depend on the type of housing; to be eligible applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be over 18 years of age for general needs accommodation – in exceptional circumstances we house 16 or 17 year olds.
- All lettings to single person households' under 33 (as by 2018 they would be 35) should be on Assured Shorthold Tenancies with an end date of April 2018 (subject to the statutory requirement for a six month minimum tenancy). Once the bill proposing LHA rates for under 35 is passed and clarified, the tenure of these tenants will be reviewed to ensure it remains the most appropriate tenure.
- Be over 55 years old for sheltered (only one person in a partnership must be 55);
- Be in housing need.
- Have the 'Right to Rent' in line with the Immigration Act 2014

We do not automatically exclude people and will consider the circumstances and need in each individual case, e.g. in cases of rent arrears we will consider cases where the applicant(s) can demonstrate that they have taken steps to rectify the situation, however applicants who meet the above criteria **may** be rejected for the following reasons:

- A tenant or owner of another home.
- Have unmet support needs which we cannot meet.
- Provided false or misleading information in their application.
- Have outstanding rent arrears with saha or another landlord and the debt is not being repaid.
- Have broken the terms of a previous tenancy with ourselves or another landlord and we or the landlord has taken legal action, for example, anti-social behaviour.
- Under or over occupation of the property allocated to.
- Do not meet the specific criteria for a disabled property, sheltered, supported, foyer or other accommodation designed for specific groups.
- Do not have the 'Right to Rent'.
- Do not meet criteria under the Local Lettings Policy.

Assessing applicants

Direct applicants, move-on applicants, transfer applicants and applicants for supported housing are assessed against our prioritisation points scheme to help determine need and priority. Properties are offered to suitable applicants who are in the highest band/have the highest number of points. We are looking to move towards a banding system.

We carry out assessments to transfer, referral and direct applicants to verify circumstances, complete a vulnerability matrix and discuss options. We assess all applicants against our eligibility criteria. Whilst we give preference to those in housing need, we may also consider the needs of the wider community. The decision to allocate a specific property will include an overall assessment of the potential sustainability of the tenancy and its contribution to maintaining a sustainable community. In some areas we may agree a Local Lettings Policy with residents and the local authority and lettings will be made in line with that policy.

We aim to support people into independent living and create sustainable communities. To achieve this we need to ensure that people are getting the support they need. Where an applicant is identified as vulnerable, we will request information on the support that they are receiving. Where we believe support is inadequate for the type of accommodation available, we may refer the applicant to a support provider.

Where an applicant is referred to accommodation specifically designed to support them in independent living, we will carry out vulnerability matrix. This assessment is designed to ensure that, working with other agencies, the appropriate support is provided at the times and frequency required to enable the tenancy to be sustained. This assessment is not used as a basis for rejecting an applicant.

All rejections are approved by the allocations team leader. Where we reject someone, we will always give clear reasons why and give the person information on alternative options.

Right to Rent

In accordance with the Immigration Act 2014, saha will carry out the necessary tasks to ensure the applicant has the right to rent. This is applicable to all lets regardless of their allocation route. Checks will be made to ensure that the individual has the appropriate immigration and/or other related permits, visas and identification to reside in the UK. (The original documents must be seen). Copies will be taken and securely stored and every adult in the household will be assessed for their Right to Rent.

Size of property allocated

In determining whether a property is suitable in terms of size, a separate bedroom is deemed necessary for:

- A cohabiting couple.
- A parent in a single parent family.
- Each adult over 18.
- Children over 10 of different sexes.
- More than two children whatever age or sex.

Under-occupation

saha works to meet regulatory standards:

“Registered providers shall develop and deliver services to address under occupation and overcrowding in their homes, within the resources available to them. These services should meet the needs of their tenants, and will offer choices to them”.

saha has a predominance of single accommodation, however in areas where we have family accommodation we ensure that we work in partnership with the Local Authority to offer incentives where under-occupation has been identified.

When allocating properties, saha will be mindful of recent welfare reforms. Therefore if an applicant is in receipt of welfare benefits, the Association will not allocate a home for which the household would be considered to be under occupying and therefore ineligible for sufficient benefit income to cover the rent charged. The exception to this would be where it is clearly evidenced that the under occupation would cease within three months of the tenancy commencement, for example where an additional member will be joining the household such as a returning member of the armed forces.

Making offers

When we make an offer of housing we will always give applicants details of the accommodation and an opportunity to view the property, with a member of staff available to answer questions and point out any specific features. In the case of supported housing applicants, they may also have the opportunity to meet other service users who will be sharing the accommodation. At this stage we will give a copy of our minimum lettings standard for our empty properties and an information pack about the property and the area, including a copy of the tenancy agreement.

We will give an applicant at least 2 calendar days to make a decision about the property offered to them. Where the property is accepted, we will arrange for the tenancy to be signed at our offices or at the property. At the sign up interview, we will give further information on saha's policies and procedures and collect information from the new tenant, including their preferred method of receiving future information and communication. Follow up visits one month after moving in are carried out for all new tenants to ensure that they have settled into their new home, to give them an opportunity to ask questions and to identify any issues with the tenancy or any support needs.

Lettings to staff, their relatives or Salvation Army personnel

Saha wishes to maintain the highest standards of integrity by not giving non contractual benefits to our staff, board members or their families or those of our parent organisation, The Salvation Army. We do this by ensuring we do not grant tenancies where this is not a contractual part of the job or, in relation to The Salvation Army, there is significant social benefit to the local community in doing so. In certain circumstances a tenancy may be granted but this would be carefully considered, with the benefit of doing so quantified and approved by the Executive Management Team. Any lettings to staff, relatives or Salvation Army personnel will be subject to the same rent levels that would be expected from any applicant.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

We will keep applicants informed at all stages of the lettings process using the most appropriate method of communication requested by the applicant, for instance translated information, keeping the applicant informed by phone or involving an advocate.

We aim to provide a fair and transparent lettings service that is inclusive. To ensure that we achieve this we will monitor our lettings. Where our lettings are not reflecting the diversity of local housing needs we will identify action that we need to take.

Appeals Process

Where an applicant or existing resident disagrees with an allocations decision made by saha, they have the right to appeal. Appeals will be considered using the Association's standard complaints process.

Monitoring

We have a set of service standards or promises for our allocations and lettings service. We monitor these through regular feedback from new residents, spot checks and audits. We report back to staff and residents through our regular newsletters.

We monitor that our homes are speedily and fairly let by:

- Setting ourselves clear targets for letting homes that are monitored regularly.
- Running weekly management reports to identify progress on letting empty properties.
- Producing quarterly Key Performance Indicator (KPI) information that is reported to our senior management team.
- Producing monthly Tenancy Sustainment information to identify issues or trends which may impact negatively on our allocations.
- Publicising performance information to residents via the quarterly newsletter.

We monitor satisfaction with our lettings service through a follow up feedback survey of all new tenants. We feedback the results to residents through our newsletter and use the information to help improve our service.

We record all lettings in the Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) system for monitoring the characteristics of all RP lettings.

Implementation

We will ensure that the implementation of this policy is proactively inclusive across all areas of our activity and paying particular attention to the nine protected characteristics – age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

Policy Review

We will review the operation of this policy in consultation with our residents, staff and relevant stakeholders (where appropriate), in light of current best practice, amending the policy where required.

The Directorate of Housing Services has overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy, and each local manager will have direct responsibility to ensure it is implemented effectively.

Document History Log

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P Latham	21/10/2010			1.0	Monitoring Committee	21/10/2010
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S Haslam		11.01.2017	February 2020			
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Equalities Monitoring Form			
Name of Policy: Allocation and Referral Policy		Carried out by: Alpita Patel	Date: 30 March 2016
Protected characteristics	Impact <i>(Positive, Negative, Neutral)</i>	Protected characteristics	Impact <i>(Positive, Negative, Neutral)</i>
Age	Neutral	Disability	Neutral
Sex (gender)	Neutral	Race	Neutral
Religion or Belief	Neutral	Sexual Orientation	Neutral
Marriage / Civil Partnerships	Neutral	Pregnancy / Maternity	Neutral
If, Negative impact is identified, please complete The Full EMF including mitigations of risks section and return back to BSI Team.			