

Allocations Policy



INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Warrington Housing Associations (WHA) vision is to help make our neighbourhoods in St Helens and Warrington great places to live, in which the potential of individuals and communities can be realised. Our thematic pillar “Our neighbourhoods” help us to set out how we want to prioritise the needs of people and put the creation of sustainable communities at the heart of our work.

The purpose of this allocations policy is intended to outline how and to whom WHA allocate our vacant properties and we aim to allocate homes to customers in a fair and transparent manner, taking customer needs and the sustainability of communities into account.

WHA is signed up to the Local Authorities in which we operate commitment to refer people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to the local Under One Roof service.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that we provide good quality affordable homes which are allocated through a lettings service which is transparent, fair and efficient and ensures the properties are allocated as quickly as possible so that the period they are empty is kept to a minimum.

The policy also aims to ensure that WHA makes the best use of its homes whilst also promoting social inclusion and creating mixed and balanced communities.

WHA is committed to working in partnership with both Local Authorities to assist them to meet their statutory obligations to people with housing needs and to meet the priorities set out in their Tenancy Strategy.

We will allocate our homes based on the relevant Local Authorities allocations policy and banding which prioritises on housing need, suitability, legislation, eligibility and in accordance with local authority nomination agreements and balancing the needs of the community.

Our allocations policy aims to allocate homes to customers in a fair and transparent manner, taking customer needs and the sustainability of communities into account.

SCOPE

This policy will apply to all our general needs and retirement housing properties. It does not apply to specialist, market rent, or shared ownership properties.

We aim to consult with customers in developing the policy and the services we provide. Residents have been involved in agreeing the terms of the Allocation policy.

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LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

This policy is supported by detailed procedures and ensures compliance with the regulatory framework which is outlined below:

Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent, and efficient way. They shall consider the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how their lettings:

- Make the best use of available housing.
- Are compatible with the purpose of the housing.
- Contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities.
- Have clear allocations, decision-making and appeals processes.

Listed below are the key Acts and Regulations to be acknowledged:

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1988
- Housing Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Housing and Homelessness Regulations 2006
- Immigration Act 2016
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

WHO CAN BE ELIGIBLE

Any one over the age of 18 years and who meets the eligibility criteria can apply.

We will not consider registering applicants who:

- Are minors aged 16 or 17 years old and may only do so in exceptional circumstances – such as, the applicant is able to live independently, can demonstrate that they have lived independently for a period successfully and have access to local, ongoing appropriate support and may require a guarantor if applicable;
- The applicant or a proposed household member moving with the potential applicant, has been guilty of serious antisocial behaviour including non-compliance with a current or former tenancy which makes them in the view of WHA unsuitable to be a tenant. Each case would be looked at on an individual basis. If rejected solely on this ground, WHA may consider a further application at the request of the customer if following a full 12 month period has passed and there has been no further cause for complaint or concern against the customer or their household. This would be solely and will remain at WHAs discretion.

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- The applicant or any member of their household has verbally or physically assaulted a member of WHA staff or those individuals representing WHA organisation in delivering its work, in our homes or buildings.
- Have outstanding current or former arrears of above £250.00. If arrears are below this amount and a regular demonstrable payment pattern is being maintained, WHA may register the application, but an offer to accommodate would only be made when all arrears have been paid in full.
- A regular payment plan would be a minimum of at least 13 weekly payments, without any breaks in the agreed payment plan, the amounts paid must also match the pre agreed level. We will also consider any 'exceptional circumstances' that could have caused or contributed the arrears to accrue, again on a case-by-case basis.
- Do not have sufficient financial resources and cannot demonstrate that they are able to sustain a tenancy.
- Cannot provide all required proofs of identity, eligibility and tenancy history requested within the time frame agreed.
- Have knowingly given false or misleading information or deliberately withheld information as part of the application process.
- Are excluded due to immigration status or cannot provide requested proof of status documentation from the Home Office.
- Are serious offenders unless we have the written backing and support of the Police and local authority. WHA will always have the final say if an allocation is suitable based on local knowledge of the area, community dynamics, and suitability of customer in that area.
- Are in prison – we will defer applications for accommodation until the applicant has left prison and have official notice of this from relevant agencies – i.e. probation. Applicants must also provide relevant information regarding all offences, and we will also require a relevant 'live' risk assessment completed by relevant agencies. We would require information about relevant ongoing, local support which will be provided for the applicant to help them sustain any tenancy upon their release and this must be a minimum of 12 months face to face support—.
- Are owner occupiers, have tenancy or part ownership of another property. For owner occupiers we would not offer accommodation until there is written proof of sale and equity. If the property cannot be sold due to court order or there are extreme financial circumstances, then written evidence supporting this may be considered. We will actively consider applications from those eligible and applying for specialist or retirement housing on a case-by-case basis.

We will offer advice, assistance, and signposting to appropriate referrals to applicants we will not accept for rehousing.

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NOMINATIONS

Whilst we retain the ability to consider and facilitate management moves for our tenants, should their housing need change from their current home and a more appropriate property become available. We will offer all remaining available vacancies to the Local Authority choice based letting system, currently via Torus 'Under One Roof'.

Nominations will be prioritised according to their allocation policy. We will offer an agreed % of vacancies to those accepted as Priority homeless and in an urgent need of rehousing.

MANAGEMENT MOVES

WHA tenants can be considered for a management move. Those applying will not be eligible to apply until they have been living in their home for a minimum of 12 months.

Tenants who have breached their tenancy will not be allowed to register or if they have already registered before the breach, will be suspended until their breach is amended.

Tenants who owe monies to Warrington Housing Association may not be considered for a move until all debts are cleared in full, this includes rent arrears, recharges, court costs, and housing benefit overpayments.

Exceptions to this restriction may include those who wish to downsize and are in rent arrears due to restrictions to their housing benefit payments because of the bedroom size criteria or the benefit cap or if a household need to transfer due to serious domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour or harassment that can be demonstrated or and support from external agencies is provided.

Each case will be looked on a case-by-case basis, and we will speak to you about how we came to any decisions, so you are fully aware.

In a relationship breakdown WHA will try to take a sympathetic view but realistically may not be able to accommodate both partners.

Allocations to management moves will not make up more than **10%** of annual lettings.

HOW TO APPLY

To be considered for a management move, tenants will need to contact their Housing Officer in the first instance, providing evidence of their change in circumstances or need, and provide details to support their request.

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The request will be shared with either the Housing Manager or Head of Service to consider and determine priority and availability of suitable properties in the neighbourhoods the tenant wishes to be rehoused in. Management moves will only be considered if there is a likelihood that a suitable property may become available within a two year period (or shorter if housing need is more urgent) in the event this is not deemed possible, the tenant may be supported in seeking rehousing with an alternative landlord via the Under One Roof choice based lettings system.

Applicants must sign a declaration that the information provided is correct and that they will allow WHA to make enquiries about their eligibility for housing and level of priority. We will also ask for consent to provide other partner agencies with information as necessary, and we will ensure we follow GDPR compliance.

It is the applicant's responsibility to provide requested proofs of identity, eligibility, tenancy history, income and supporting information or documents as requested within an agreed time frame.

Upon receipt of a management move enquiry, and receipt of all requested information, WHA will endeavour to register applications within 10 working days from the date all requested information has been received and verified as correct. WHA will inform you when this process is complete and will maintain contact with the tenant regarding any suitable vacancies that may become available that meets their needs.

REFERENCE AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

WHA may require references from the current or previous landlords; you will be advised about this when you submit your completed application form.

We will assess whether a detailed check of available information is required before an applicant is confirmed onto the waiting list. We will talk you through this process, what is required and by what date, so you are clear.

If an applicant is placed on the waiting list for an extended time, further checks may be completed to ensure information is up to date at the time of any potential offer, again we will talk you through this.

We will ask for evidence as noted below at the time of your initial application –applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis, and the list is not exhaustive:

- Proof of ID i.e. passport
- Proof you are not subject to immigration control or a person from abroad who is not entitled to the public purse and/or social housing.

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- National Insurance Number
- Satisfactory Landlord references. All applicants are required to provide a minimum of 5 years housing history. We require at least one reference from current or previous landlord and references will be requested before an offer is made.
- Proof of income
- Proof of child benefit
- Proof of savings as per the Local Authority eligibility cap (where relevant)
- Proof that Housing Related Support is available (where relevant). We do need to consider if customers can successfully sustain a tenancy and WHA may need written assurances that local support is available from other support agencies on an ongoing basis.
- Proof not a homeowner or has an 'interest' in a property or is tenant of other property.

We carry out financial affordability calculations on nominated applicants as necessary, or many seek further information via PPU or police checks to access information about you – we will inform you of this and talk to you about what this means. We may will also see information via a credit check, again we will tell you about this before it is actioned.

In the interests of community safety, all customers are asked to disclose serious criminal convictions. WHA may seek additional information to decide if the applicant should be disqualified from joining the waiting list due to serious unacceptable behaviour and/or because depending on the facts they, may pose a risk to a community where they wish to be rehoused.

Information received may not exclude an applicant, but it can help us make an informed decision about where and if we offer accommodation.

SUITABILITY

Property and household ratio guidelines are provided and followed whenever possible though there may be occasions when properties are let to households outside of the guidelines. (See Appendix 1).

Children will not be considered on an application if they have a permanent home elsewhere. Applicants will be asked to evidence in writing, proof of child benefit entitlement and proof of residency or custody order at the time of application.

Applicants with children under the age of 10 will not be rehoused in upper apartments in communal blocks, unless there is a local lettings policy which permits this.

We have a number of specialist, retirement and age friendly properties where is it not appropriate to rehouse people who have younger household members, at the time of

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application and potential offer we will talk to you about this and explain our reasons why it is not appropriate. Where relevant we will signpost you to more suitable services.

Houses will first be offered to households with a child under the age of 18 years or if in full time education or apprenticeship up to the age of 21 years.

WHA retains the right to refuse an application from a vulnerable adult unless it is satisfied that an appropriate, ongoing local support package is in place.

WHA will balance the housing needs and rights of high risk convicted offenders against public interest and community safety and only consider applications from high-risk offenders when nominated by the local authority and when they can confirm they have investigated the risks associated with rehousing in an identified property and suitable risk assessment and monitoring arrangements are in place.

WHA will not normally offer accommodation to any person who has an interest in a property elsewhere, either through ownership or a tenancy. If customers own a home, we require proof of sale and subsequent equity before an offer is made. This only applies to general need accommodation. In relation to retirement accommodation for those with support needs, each applicant is required to demonstrate that any owned property has been registered for sale with a reputable estate agents of property sales organisation. We will always require written proof from the selling company, detailing the property in question is for sale.

We aim to match households requiring specially adapted homes with suitable properties. Properties with an adaptation will normally only be let to a household who has been assessed as in need of such an adaptation. Applicants will only be registered for properties that meet their need and have the necessary adaptations that are required to support independent living.

Tenants requesting a management move or general transfer may be encouraged to seek a mutual exchange to increase their chances of moving and as such Warrington Housing Association is a member of the national mobility home swapper scheme. All potential exchanges of property must be approved before they can take place. Further guidance is available on mutual exchanges.

Tenants seeking to downsize into a smaller home and who are affected by the bedroom tax may qualify for financial and practical assistance dependant on current Local Authority schemes continuing. Those seeking to downsize and move into retirement housing may also qualify for a small cash incentive subject to adhering to the association's guidelines around this.

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Offers will be made by telephone or in writing. Customers are requested to respond within 2 days, or the offer will be considered as a refusal.

COMPLAINTS AND RIGHT TO APPEAL

All customers have the right to complain and can appeal against a decision to refuse their nomination or against an offer of accommodation. An appeal must be received within 7 working days of refusal or offer and will be considered by a Senior Manager.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

In implementing our Allocations Policy, we will treat all customers with fairness. Where applicants require additional, ongoing, local support, we will incorporate additional flexibility to provide a service that seeks to meet their individual challenges and needs.

An equality impact assessment has been carried out, and it demonstrates that there are no negative impacts on any group as identified by the Equality Act.

RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FURTHER READING

- Tenancy Policy
- Transfer procedure
- Downsizing procedure
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Harassment Policy
- Void Policy
- Nomination's agreement
- Anti-Social behaviour Policy
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- WHA local letting policies.

RESPONSIBILITY

The Head of Housing & Customer Services is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if required by statutory, regulatory, or best practice changes.

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APPENDIX 1

	Bedsit	1 bed	2 beds	3 beds	4+ bed
Single person or couple (Apartments only) Those with children will be given priority for 2 beds)	ü	ü	ü		
Household with one child			ü		
Household with two children (If affected by bedroom tax we will only register if evidence is provided to show that this is affordable)			ü	ü	
Household with three children				ü	ü
Household with four or more children				ü	ü

Note: Only the applicants' own children where the applicant/s is the sole legal guardian will be accepted as part of the household. Where there is another legal guardian and this can be demonstrated by written proof from a court or a solicitor, a decision will be made on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is reasonable to accept the child as part of the household on the application.

Reasonable evidence such as proof of child benefit awarded to the applicant and further written evidence from an appropriate body may be considered as part of the decision process.

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