

Allocations Policy



Our Neighbourhood Service

Warrington Housing Association

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Warrington Housing Associations (WHA) vision is to help make Warrington a great place 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.

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 Warrington Borough Council 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 housing need, suitability, legislation, eligibility and in accordance with local authority nomination agreements and balancing the needs of the community.

SCOPE

This policy will apply to all our general needs and sheltered housing properties. It does not apply to supported, 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.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

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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 take into account 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 application, decision-making and appeals processes.

Listed below are the key Acts to be acknowledged:

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

WHO CAN APPLY?

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 and would only do so in exceptional circumstances if they are able to live independently, or otherwise have access to appropriate support.
- Have 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 on this

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ground we may consider a further application at the request of the customer if following 12 months there has been no further cause for complaint or concern against the customer or their household. This would be at WHAs discretion.

- They or any member of their household have assaulted a member of staff or those representing the 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 payment pattern is being maintained we will register but an offer 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 at an agreed level. We will also consider any exceptional circumstances that may have caused arrears to accrue.
- Do not have sufficient financial resources and cannot demonstrate that they are able to sustain a tenancy.
- Cannot provide all the proofs of identity, eligibility and tenancy history we require
- Have knowingly given false or misleading information or deliberately withheld information.
- Are excluded due to immigration status
- Are serious offenders unless we have the backing and support of the Police. WHA will always have the final say if an allocation is suitable based on local knowledge of the area and suitability of customer.
- Are in prison – we will defer applications 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 offences and we will also require a relevant risk assessment completed by relevant agencies We would require information about relevant 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 support

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- Are owner occupiers or have tenancy of another property. For owner occupiers we would not offer accommodation until there is proof of sale and equity. If property cannot be sold due to court order or there are extreme financial circumstances then this will be taken into account. We will however consider applications from those applying for retirement housing.

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

NOMINATIONS

WHA will offer up to 50% of vacancies each year to Warrington Borough Council, 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.

TRANSFERS

WHA tenants can also apply for a transfer. 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 transfer 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 who are in rent arrears due to restrictions to their housing benefit payments as a result 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 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 transfers will not generally make up more than 10% of annual lettings.

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HOW TO APPLY

To join WHAs waiting list, customers need to complete an online web application form. The application form has been designed to cover general and retirement housing needs, we ask that you take time to complete this form in full, detailing any relevant information. For those with no access to our website we can also offer you the option of emailing a version or where required, a paper application form.

Customers will sign a declaration that the information provided is correct and that they 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 GDPR compliance.

WHA can offer help to any customer who has difficulty completing the application form over the phone or on a Zoom or Teams portal.

It is the customer's responsibility to provide any proofs of identity, eligibility, tenancy history, income and supporting information or documents as requested.

All incomplete applications will be cancelled after 12 weeks. This does not prevent customers reapplying for accommodation, but the date of application will not be backdated to the earlier application.

On receipt of all requested information, WHA will endeavour to register applications within 10 working days from the date all information is received.

REFERENCE AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

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

We will assess whether a detailed check of available information is required before customers confirmed on the waiting list. We will talk you through this process and what is required.

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.

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Generally, we will ask for evidence as noted below – however, 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 social housing
- 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 at the point of any offer
- Proof of income
- Proof of child benefit
- Proof that support is available. We do need to take into account if customers can sustain a tenancy and may need assurances that support is available from other Support Agencies
- Proof not a home owner or tenant of other property

We may carry out credit checks on applicants as necessary or seek further police checks or information. In the interests of community safety all customers are asked to disclose serious criminal convictions. WHA may seek additional information to decide if the customer 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 may be rehoused. Information may not exclude a customer but may help us make an informed decision about where we offer accommodation.

REGISTRATION ON TO THE WAITING LIST

When an application is accepted onto our waiting list we will advise the customer in writing (this will include electronic messaging) the group they are in, date of registration and advise the customer that they must tell WHA of any change in circumstance as soon as possible.

REVIEWING THE WAITING LIST

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WHA will carry out a review of all applications on a regular basis and we may contact you as part of this process. Customers will be removed from our list if they do not reply within 28 days.

You are also asked to contact us on an annual basis to confirm that you wish to remain on our waiting list and update us on any changes to your application or needs.

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 taken into account on an application if they have a permanent home elsewhere. Customers will be asked to evidence proof of child benefit entitlement and proof of residency or custody order.

Applicants with children under the age of 10 will not be rehoused in apartments with communal blocks, unless there is a local lettings policy which permits this. We will on certain schemes let apartments to applicants with children under 10 years old where there is a ground floor flat access to the property. This does not apply to schemes which are age restricted, such as retirement housing for the over 55's.

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

WHA retains the right to refuse an application from a vulnerable adult unless it is satisfied that an appropriate 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

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require proof of sale before an offer is made. This only applies to general need accommodation.

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. Customers will also normally only be registered for properties that meet their need and have the necessary adaptations that are required.

HOW HOUSING NEEDS IS ASSESSED

From the information provided on the application form WHA will assess customers housing need. WHA operates a priority system based on three groups and all customers who apply will be placed in one of these priority groups. Within each group the customer will be placed in date order.

- Group A Urgent need
- Group B Priority Need
- Group C No strong need

GROUP A - Urgent / exceptional need to move

Homeless or about to become homeless within the next 56 days.

Evidence will be needed, and it is unlikely we will be able to assist due to our housing stock and low turnover and most customers who are statutory homeless will be referred to Housing Plus for advice and assistance.

All nominations referred to WHA who have been accepted by the Local Authority as statutorily homeless will be placed in this group

Severe medical grounds

Customers need to demonstrate that they are unable to use basic facilities such as stairs or bathroom and their medical condition is being exacerbated by their current housing situation. We will ask for supporting evidence such as an occupational health report as appropriate to ensure people are offered appropriate housing.

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Severe social grounds
We will give priority to people who are suffering serious domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour or harassment or if there is a very real threat of violence or abuse and it is dangerous for customers to remain in their home. Evidence will be requested as appropriate from police, social services, MARAC, or other agencies to support this and ensure rehousing is suitable. If a WHA tenant the internal harassment procedures must have been followed.
Needing to be discharged from hospital and need re housing for this discharge to take place. Evidence is needed from the hospital, social worker or Occupational Therapist that discharge from hospital is not possible without more suitable accommodation.
Warrington Housing Association tenant and are under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms and seeking sheltered or lower demand properties Please note that if placed in Group A if any suitable offers are refused you may be placed into a lower group.
GROUP B – Priority need
Less serious medical grounds This will apply where your medical condition is being made worse by your current housing circumstances. Minor medical conditions which are affected by any housing circumstances will not fall into this category. We will require medical evidence to support this.
Less serious social grounds You will need evidence from the police or other agencies /professionals but the risk is less than those who are placed in group A.
Current home is under occupied or overcrowded by one bed room or more Single adults or couples need a separate bedroom, children of the opposite sex can share a bedroom under the age of 10 and children of the same sex can share under the age of 16.
Lodging with non-family members and sharing facilities
Living in a private rented property with an assured short hold tenancy and are struggling financially Evidence would be needed.
Moving to Warrington to receive support or provide support or have a job in Warrington

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Evidence would be needed to show that the applicant needs support due to mental health, medical or welfare issues and this support cannot be achieved or maintained through public transport or own transport. Proof of employment or apprenticeship is also needed.

60 plus or disabled and are struggling to manage the upkeep to your home and gardens

Evidence would be needed.

Living in apartments above ground floor with no lift and have children under 10 years old

Severe financial hardship and unable to stay in your home.

This would be where an applicant is so financially impacted by their current housing that they cannot afford to live in the property. Evidence would be needed to support this. If you are an owner occupier, we generally require proof of sale and equity before we can offer accommodation.

Relationship breakdown

Your relationship with the partner you live with has broken down and one partner needs to leave. (The award will only be made to the leaving partner, providing the carer of any children is staying in the property)

Moving on from supported housing

Evidence will be required that the tenant has successfully completed any required rehabilitation and is ready to live independently and has a suitable support package in place.

Leaving armed forces

Evidence such as a discharge letter will be required from the Armed forces.

Group C - No strong need

Living outside Warrington

If you live outside Warrington and don't have a local connection or have local connection but no housing need you will be placed in group C.

If you have a local connection and are in housing need as listed above, you will be placed in group B.

Local connection for the purpose of this policy will be living in Warrington for 3 years out of the past 5 years or have close family members i.e. parents or siblings who live in Warrington.

Capital and income

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If there is joint income of more than £60,000 or capital and savings of more than £24,000, we will consider that there are other options available such as buying or renting privately.

No housing need

If there is no housing need or applicants do not fall into the categories mentioned above, they will be placed into group C.

HOW IT WORKS

Priority will be given in each group depending on the date of application. If a customer changes group, their date of application will be changed so no-one will be disadvantaged by time waited.

A broad quota system is in place which offers a % of lettings to each group. This % will be reviewed on an annual basis and ensures that customers from all groups have a chance of being offered a property even if in a lower priority group. Currently 5% of lettings will go to those in Band A, 5% to band C and 90% to those in Band B.

Those seeking medical priority must get a medical proforma completed by their GP or consultant stating why rehousing is needed. Priority will only be given if it is evidenced that the customer's current accommodation is having a severely detrimental effect on their medical condition.

Customers who wish to downsize and who are affected by the "bedroom tax" will be eligible to apply for the downsizing scheme. Those who are successful will be granted Group B status.

Priority for overcrowding will be given to households under the terms in the 'bedroom standard'. This means a separate bedroom is required for an adult couple, each other person aged 16 and over, two children of the same sex under 16, children of the opposite sex who are under 10, any other child, a non-resident carer for a person requiring overnight care and a disabled child who is unable to share a bedroom.

Higher priority may be awarded to overcrowded households when bedrooms are exceptionally small. (i.e., suitable for one person only). Priority will not be awarded if the household has deliberately made their household overcrowded.

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Priority can be given to an adult living in a Warrington Housing Association home following a relationship breakdown. This will normally only be awarded if the living arrangements are having a detrimental effect on an existing household member.

Whilst WHA operates a group system for all lettings, it is important that we are able to allocate some properties on a sensitive basis. In order to promote social inclusion and create mixed and balanced communities and take account of the health and safety of applicants it is important to allocate sensitively. Any sensitive/ management lettings will be approved by the Customer Services Director.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicants who are registered and refuse two suitable offers without good reason will have their application withdrawn from the waiting list.

Transfer list applicants are 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.

The length of time taken for an offer of accommodation to be made is dependent on several factors including:

- Grouping category and housing need
- The size and type of property required
- The area(s) of preference
- Suitable properties becoming available

It is not therefore possible to advise customers when they are likely to be offered accommodation.

People seeking to downsize into a smaller home and who are affected by the bedroom tax may qualify for financial and practical assistance with moving. Those seeking to downsize and move into retirement housing may also qualify for a cash incentive.

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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 application 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.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

In implementing our Allocations Policy, we aim to treat all customers fairly. Where applicants require additional support, we will incorporate additional flexibility to provide a service that seeks to meet their needs. An equality impact assessment has been carried out which shows that generally there is a positive impact.

RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Transfer policy
- Downsizing procedure
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Complaint Policy
- Harassment policy
- Void Policy
- Nominations agreement
- Anti-Social behaviour policy
- Equal opportunities Policy
- Any local letting policy

RESPONSIBILITY

The Customer Services Director is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

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

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 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 will be proof of child benefit or written evidence from an appropriate body.

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