

Local Lettings Policy

**New Build Properties
January 2023**



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CONTROL SHEET FOR [policy title here]

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1. Introduction

The Bolsover Homes Programme seeks to provide more than 150 homes in the District by March 2024. Sites have been developed in key locations, with a mixture of property type to reflect the housing need in that specific location. Allocations to new developments require a mix of tenants to create sustainable communities and to give priority to local people.

Section 166A(6)(b) of the Housing Act 1996 enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description outside the Council's standard allocations procedure, provided that overall the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of S.166A(3) *'to give overall priority for an allocation to people in the reasonable preference categories'*. This includes those who are homeless, in overcrowded conditions, have urgent medical needs or who need to move to avoid hardship.

This is the statutory basis for 'local lettings policies', which may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives. For example when considering an applicant the demographics of the area may be taken into consideration to create a more balanced community.

The Council's Allocations Policy ensures that people in most need are placed in the reasonable preference categories and are able to access council accommodation, therefore this policy will be used in conjunction with the Council's Allocations Policy.

This Local Lettings Policy details the method of allocating the properties for rent to applicants initially through the Allocations Policy and then by direct match.

2. Scope

As far as possible, this policy is designed to:

- Meet housing need within the District by making best use of properties in order to create balanced, sustainable communities
- Ensure that homes are allocated in a clear, fair and transparent manner
- Make sure the Council is complying with housing and related legislation

This policy will be taken into account alongside the Council's Allocations policy, and amongst other legislation, have due regard in particular to the;

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012
- Welfare Reforms
- Equalities Act
- Human Rights Act

3. Principles

The policy will link to the Council's Ambitions and priorities by;

- Increasing customer satisfaction with our services
- Providing good quality council housing where people choose to live
- Enabling Housing Growth: increasing the supply, quality and range of housing to meet the needs of the growing population and support economic growth
- Making the best use of our assets

4. Statement

4.1 Schemes Covered by the Local Lettings Policy

The Local Lettings Policy will apply to the Bolsover Homes new build properties and any other new build schemes in the District owned/managed by the Council.

Any property with adaptations will be excluded from this policy as these are allocated through the Housing Allocation and Review Panel (HARP).

4.2. Objectives

The objective is to give local people a higher priority and create sustainable communities.

In addition to the normal allocations procedure, an interview with a member of the housing team prior to any offer of accommodation being made will be introduced for all shortlisted applicants. The rationale is to prevent anti-social behaviour and unsuccessful tenancies, but it will also ensure that the properties will be allocated to people with a strong local connection to the ward.

4.3 Advertising the Vacant Properties

The properties will be advertised through the Council's Choice Based Letting system in accordance with the usual Allocations Policy, and placed into bands A, B or C. This will ensure that preference will be given to applicants with a strong local connection. The advert will make it clear the Local Lettings Policy is being applied.

Applicants will bid on the advertised properties to express an interest in accordance with the Council's procedure.

4.4 Allocating a Property

In the first instance priority will be given to applicants who;

Live in or have a strong connection to the ward where the new properties are located (assessment will be via interview using the district definition). A strong local connection criteria will include;

- Living within the ward where the new build homes are located (and have for the past 3 years)

- Has a close family member (parents, grandparents or children) living in the ward – (and have for the past 3 years)
- Can demonstrate a strong local connection having lived in the area for five years e.g. lived in the area as a child and then moved away
- Currently living outside of the ward but are in paid employment within the ward – (and have for the past 3 years)

If there are no applicants in the categories above, the properties will be allocated in accordance with the Council Allocations Policy, in order of priority banding and waiting time.

Applicants, via the Choice Based Lettings system, will undergo a first stage assessment based on the Council's Allocations Policy. Successful shortlisted applicants will then be required to undergo a second stage selection process based on the criteria set out in this Local Lettings Policy before any offer of accommodation is made.

The second stage selection process will require the applicant to attend an interview with the Housing Needs Assistants and Housing Tenancy Assistant for the area. If the applicant refuses the interview they will not be considered for the property.

The interview is to conduct various assessments such as, but is not inclusive;

- Local connection assessment
- Priority needs assessment
- Affordability assessment
- Tenancy Risk assessment
- Health and Disability assessment
- Tenancy support needs

Some applicants may need help to sustain a tenancy for example, those with complex needs, including applicants who;

- have a drug, alcohol or other addiction including those in rehabilitation,
- have extensive support needs.

The local housing team will make a decision to make an offer of accommodation based on the information provided from the applicant's housing application and second stage assessments.

Properties may be refused to households that do not agree to an appropriate support plan or where a support plan is not feasible.

Properties allocated will meet the eligibility criteria for the size of the property to discourage under-occupation and overcrowding and to make best use of housing stock. To minimise voids exceptions may apply. However if it is deemed that an applicant will be under-occupying they will be subject to an affordability test before any offer of accommodation is made. Such cases will be considered by the HARP prior to an offer being made.

Properties may be refused to households with a history of anti-social behaviour or poor conduct of a previous tenancy. Where the applicant meets one of the following criteria they

may not be offered a tenancy in the scheme for a at least a period of two years, if the applicant;

- is known to have been involved in anti-social behaviour within the last 2 years,
- is unable to demonstrate an ability to sustain a tenancy for a minimum period of the last 12 months,
- has an unspent criminal conviction,
- has been convicted of, or has been held responsible for, criminal damage or arson within the last 12 months.

Such cases will be considered by the HARP prior to an offer being made.

4.5 Verification

Verification of circumstances may be required and may include, but is not exhaustive;

- A verification visit to their current accommodation to confirm personal and household circumstances and evaluate ability to act in a 'tenant like manner' in terms of upkeep of property and garden.
- Checks on current and former tenant rent accounts where applicable.
- Checks to confirm previous tenancy good conduct.
- Checks with the Probation Service and/or the Police.
- A risk assessment of vulnerability to evaluate feasibility of support plans to sustain the tenancy.
- Credit checks and affordability evaluation using household income and expenditure.
- Evaluation of risk in relation to uncontrolled debt.
- Medical needs assessment.

Households may be required to agree to participate in progress visits as requested (reasonable notice will be given) with Council Officers to ensure ongoing sustainability of the tenancy who will then be able to provide further support/assistance if required.

4.6 Compliance with the policy

To limit the detrimental impact of long term vacant properties, in the event that insufficient bids are received from applicants meeting the criteria, the usual Allocations Policy then may be employed to a property that has been unsuccessfully let.

4.7 Duration of the Local Lettings Policy

This policy will apply to all first lets and any subsequent lets for new build properties, with the exception of subsequent lets for any Independent Living Scheme or Older Persons property.

4.8 Monitoring and Review

The policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that it remains appropriate to the properties and continues to support its objectives. The policy will be reviewed after 3 years or earlier if it is deemed that the policy is no longer required.

4.9 Equal opportunities

The Local Lettings Policy is required to comply with equality legislation and in particular, to ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination in the allocation of dwellings.

4.10 Refusal and appeal

The selection framework and checks employed may not be an automatic barrier to access housing, where an applicant has been unsuccessful in securing a property, housing advice in terms of other alternative housing options and support will be given.

Applicants who are refused accommodation through the Local Lettings Policy will be advised of the reason in writing. If an applicant is not satisfied that the Local Lettings Policy has been administered correctly they must set out the reason in writing to request a review of the decision.

Any reviews, complaints or appeals will be handled in accordance with the Councils Allocation Policy and procedure.

4.11 Elected Members' Involvement in Allocation Decisions

The Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/483) prevent an elected Member from being part of a decision-making body at the time an allocation decision is made, when either:

- the accommodation concerned is situated in their division or electoral ward, or
- the person subject to the decision has their sole or main residence in their ward.

The regulations do not prevent an elected Member from representing their constituents in front of the decision making body.

5. Responsibility for Implementation

Bolsover District Council's Housing Department will be responsible for implementing this policy.