

## **Great Places Housing Group - Lettings Policy**

### **1. Aims of the Lettings Policy**

As a Registered Provider Great Places has a duty to comply with the guidance set out in the Audit Commission's Regulatory Code in lieu of TSA Standards, in accordance with this Great Places will:

- Seek to offer a choice of home while giving reasonable preference to those in housing need
- Work responsively to the housing duties of local authority partners
- Give reasonable priority to transfer applicants
- Work with national, regional and local choice based letting and exchange schemes
- Operate a lettings policy which is demonstrably fair, non-discriminatory and effectively controlled and reflects the diversity of client groups Great Places works with
- Operate a flexible lettings policy which takes account of the need to ensure sustainable communities

In addition we will:

- Ensure that our lettings policy and procedure is clear and easy to understand, and we will facilitate a range of ways to access our properties.
- We will consult with stakeholders and service users in the formulation and review of this policy and associated procedures.

## 2. Qualifying Applicants

Great Places Housing Group welcomes applications from anyone aged sixteen or over. Applicants between the ages of sixteen and eighteen will be granted a tenancy subject to specific criteria (*see Re-housing under 18's Policy*).

Households will qualify for re-housing as below:

Property Type	Who Qualifies	Who Doesn't Qualify
All houses	Households with children, adult sharers, applicants that can demonstrate access to children or the need for a house to enable them to adopt or become foster parents	Single people or couples except where a house is in an area that Great Places Housing Group might consider unpopular with families or a property is less suitable as family housing
Flats with internal communal areas	Single people, couples, adult sharers, households with children (ground floor only). Except where exclusions or restrictions apply because of a local lettings policy.	Households with uncaged pets
Flats without internal communal areas	Single people, couples, adult sharers, households with children (where requested). Except where exclusions or restrictions apply because of a local lettings policy	
Studios	Single people, couples	Not suitable as family accommodation or for adult sharers.  Households with uncaged pets are not accepted
Maisonettes	Single people, couples, adult sharers, households with children (where requested). Except where exclusions or restrictions apply because of a local lettings policy.	
Bungalows	In the first instance any household that can demonstrate a medical need for re-housing on a single level. Some bungalows are adapted and are restricted to wheelchair users.	Households not requiring ground floor accommodation. Where there are no applicants requiring ground floor accommodation, qualification will be extended to single people, couples, adult sharers and potentially families with children, where the property is not subject to an LLP.
Older persons flats and sheltered housing	Normally applications are only considered from older single people and couples without children – age restriction set in accordance with LLP  Applications from younger households will be considered if a need for the accommodation is demonstrated. Lets to households outside the LLP should	Applicants that do not meet the qualification criteria in the LLP

	be approved by the Neighbourhood Manager prior to offer	
Disabled Adapted properties	Households that can demonstrate a need for the specific adaptations the property has to offer	Where there are not appropriate applicants for the property, the Neighbourhood Manager will consider whether it is appropriate to let the property to a household not requiring the adaptations. It may be necessary in these circumstances to remove or alter the way the property has been adapted

## 2.2 Letting according to household size

Great Places Housing Group will let properties in accordance with the CLG guidance on space standards.

In most circumstances a property let should have sufficient bedrooms so that at least one member of the household is occupying one bedroom and no more than two members of the household are sharing one double bedroom (with the exception of a child under one). Any room that could reasonably be used as a bedroom should be counted as such. Great Places Housing Group would not normally re-house a household where more than two people were expected to share a bedroom, except in circumstances of extreme hardship, where re-housing would be an improvement on the current housing situation.

In accordance with Housing Act 1985, two people of the opposite sex should not share a bedroom unless they are living together as a couple or are both children under ten. Although Great Places Housing Group will allow for people of the opposite sex to have a bedroom of their own from age 5. In the case of babies it is expected that they will share a room and they will become eligible for a bedroom space at the age of one.

Great Places Housing Group would not expect two persons of the same sex, aged eighteen or over, who are not living together as a couple to share a bedroom except by choice.

Great Places Housing Group would not normally allow a property to be under-occupied except when it can be demonstrated that there is low demand for the property, or where the local lettings plan permits under occupation to promote scheme sustainability. Under occupation may also be allowed in exceptional circumstances to promote the welfare of the household e.g. where a disabled person requires internal storage space for equipment or an occasional bedroom for a carer. Any Local Lettings Policy must include an equality impact assessment and receive approval from the Local Authority and a Regional Manager of the Association.

Where an applicant has staying access to children this will be taken into account in accommodation size made available to them, however where there is high demand priority will be given to households with full time access to children.

### 2.3 Child living at Height

Child at height priority exists where the moving group includes a child under sixteen years and the current accommodation is above the ground floor. This gives applicants our Group B priority,

### 2.4 Lettings to staff and family members

Applicants for re-housing who are employees of Great Places Housing Group or relatives of employees should declare this on their application form.

Offers of accommodation are subject to the approval of the Great Places Housing Group Board of Management. Any such application will be input onto the system and suspended until Board approval has been received.

### 2.5 Suspensions Policy

Great Places Housing Group will suspend access to the housing waiting list from certain applicants who either do not currently have a legal right to an assured periodic tenancy or where they or household member have a history of behaviour that would suggest they might not conduct a tenancy in a responsible manner.

Applicants to be suspended from the housing waiting list will be told the full reason for their suspension and given guidance as to how they can rectify the situation and become eligible for re-housing.

Applicants suspended from the housing waiting list will have the right to appeal against this decision. Suspensions will be reviewed by the Association every two years.

*See Great Places Housing Group Suspensions Criteria and Procedure*

### 2.6 Owner Occupiers

Owners and owner occupiers will be asked about any possible capital to gain and where it is likely to exceed £75,000, the Customer Services Manager will make an assessment of an applicant's circumstances (e.g. age, income, infirmity) and when he/she thinks that an applicant has sufficient funds to purchase a private property, the applicant will be advised that they can register for rehousing and will be placed in Band C on the waiting list.

Owners and owner-occupiers experiencing a relationship breakdown or who have been awarded Medical priority will not have possible future capital gains taken into account where the property is unlikely to be sold in the near future. Discretion will also be used by the Customer Services Manager where the applicant's re-housing circumstances dictate that capital gains shouldn't be considered. For example sheltered housing applicants with support needs.

Applicants who are owners or owner-occupiers should be aware that the spirit of the policy involves them intending to sell the property.

### **3. Applying for Accommodation**

The housing register is open to anyone meeting the eligibility criteria (see *Suspensions Criteria*). Great Places operates a single register for both new applicants and existing tenants seeking a transfer.

Written applications for re-housing can be made only on the Great Places Housing Group application form unless another agreed local registration system in use, for example where a choice-based lettings scheme or common housing register is in operation.

Telephone applications are also welcomed.

However the application is made, applicants must sign and date the application declaration to confirm that the information that they have given in their application is correct. In the case of telephone applications a summary of the application information will be sent to the applicant to sign

Anyone providing false information on their application form or withholding relevant details deliberately will be suspended from the housing waiting list in accordance with the *Suspensions Criteria*. Where applicants have provided false information or withheld information and this comes to light after a tenancy has been granted Great Places Housing Group will take legal action to end the tenancy in accordance with the Housing Act 1996.

All information provided to Great Places Housing Group will be kept confidential though we may share information with partner local authorities and other registered landlords. Information is only used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### **3.1 Referencing and Application Verification**

Before they will be accepted onto the housing waiting list applicants wishing to be a tenant must provide:

- Proof of National Insurance number
- Photographic proof of identity, for example a passport or driving license.

In addition to verify a household's circumstances certain evidence may be required, and the burden of responsibility for providing this rests with the applicant. Great Places Housing Group will provide application guidance notes that give examples of the type of evidence required to back up each set of circumstances.

Where appropriate we would also conduct an office interview with the applicant or home visit to ensure that we have a thorough understanding of your household's circumstances and requirements.

Applicants who do not provide evidence of their re-housing circumstances upon application will be put into the 'no need' band (Band C).

All offers of accommodation will be subject to the provision of suitable references. Applicants will be provided with guidance about who is an appropriate referee and must sign their consent to allow Great Places Housing Group to contact relevant agencies in referencing their application, and where necessary share details about their application with them. If an applicant is unable to provide a reference Great Places Housing Group will accept a Subject Access Request.

*Please see GPHG reference proforma*

#### **4 Needs Banding System**

Once the information provided in an application has been verified, applicants will be allocated to a needs band as follows:

##### **4.1 Band A – High Level Needs**

Housing Need	Restrictions
Statutory homeless inc. refugees with leave to remain required to leave home in the next 28 days	Proof required from local authority
Victim of hate crime or harassment with threat of violence (Including Domestic Violence)	Re-housing will normally only be considered outside the current neighbourhood, and advice from other agencies such as the Police may be sought. Supporting evidence can take the form of a Police report or report from a Housing Officer/Neighbourhood Coordinator involved in the case.
Emergency medical, welfare or disability  Where ground floor or bungalow accommodation becomes available applicants within a short list with emergency medical priority requiring ground floor will be considered first	Emergency Medical Emergency banding is granted only in exceptional circumstances. This includes when the applicant or a member of the applicant's household has a life threatening condition, which is seriously affected by their current housing, or their home cannot be accessed due to ill health or disability. This status must be backed up by a medical assessment undertaken by the local authority housing team.
Witness requiring protection from threat of violence	Re-housing will normally only be considered outside the current neighbourhood, and advice from other agencies such as the Police may be sought. Supporting evidence can take the form of a Police report or report from a Housing Officer/Neighbourhood Coordinator involved in the case.
Severe overcrowding	Defined as a household with three or more bedrooms (or room that could reasonably be used as a bedroom) deficient except where adults above 18 who are not part of a couple are sharing a bedroom  If a household is found to have become deliberately

	<p>overcrowded, where this could have been avoided, band A priority will not be awarded.</p> <p>Lodgers will not be taken into account when awarding overcrowding status</p>
Home subject to a clearance order by local authority, Great Places Housing Group another housing association	Great Places Housing Group will only award this status to applicants within a local authority area in which they work and may restrict offers to that area.
Households needing re-housing to leave an institution e.g. nursing home or hospital, or leaving the Armed Forces, or have left in the last 6 months and have not found settled accommodation	
Households in supported housing that have been assessed as ready to move onto independent accommodation	Households must be expected to leave independent accommodation within 6 months, evidence from the Support Worker is required.

#### 4.2 Band B – General Housing Need

Housing Need	Restrictions
Households facing hardship by current housing situation	
Homeless households where the local authority does not have a duty to re-house	
Where a family with children are unable to live together as a result of their housing situation	
Victim of hate crime or harassment (without threat of violence)	Re-housing will normally only be considered outside the current neighbourhood, and advice from other agencies such as the Police may be sought
Overcrowding	<p>Defined as a household with one or two bedroom (or room that could reasonably be used as a bedroom) deficient except where adults above 18 who are not part of a couple are sharing a bedroom</p> <p>If a household is found to have become deliberately overcrowded, where this could have been avoided, band B priority will not be awarded.</p> <p>Lodgers will not be taken into account when awarding overcrowding status</p>
Medical need	Applicants who need to move on medical grounds because

<p>Where ground floor or bungalow accommodation becomes available applicants within a short list with medical priority requiring ground floor will be considered first</p>	<p>their current home is having an adverse effect on the health of a member of the household, but who do not qualify for emergency medical priority. Medical grounds could include:</p> <p>Ground floor – a member of household requires ground floor accommodation for a current chronic medical condition or a condition that will become progressively worse and they currently live in a property with stairs;</p> <p>Extra bedroom - where an extra bedroom is required because a member of the household has a current chronic medical condition that means they need to sleep separately from a partner for all or part of the time or they require an extra bedroom that will be regularly used by a carer</p> <p>Inappropriate heating – the current home has inadequate or inappropriate heating and improved heating is required on medical grounds by a member of the household</p> <p>Sheltered housing – warden services are not currently available to the household but these are required because one or both members have a chronic medical condition, or one which will get progressively worse and they would benefit from the support of a warden.</p>
<p>Households needing to be re-housed to allow them to adopt or foster, or to be able to have access to children</p>	
<p>Under occupation of social rented property</p>	<p>Where tenants of a housing association or local authority property are under occupying by two bedrooms or more and allowing them to move would free up a larger property that could be better used by a larger family.</p>
<p>Households needing to move to be closer to people providing support or to provide support</p>	
<p>Households requiring re-housing because of a relationship breakdown</p>	
<p>Households requiring move on accommodation from supported housing</p>	<p>Evidence supporting application is required from support worker</p>
<p>Property unfit or lacks basic amenities (private sector only)</p>	
<p>Households that have to share facilities with others from outside their household</p>	
<p>Need for independent accommodation</p>	
<p>Households who wish to live closer to work or educational establishment</p>	

#### 4.3 Discretionary Housing Need

This list is not exhaustive; households whose need cannot be categorised as above should be discussed with the Customer Services Manager who will decide whether it is appropriate to categorise as band B and will confirm the most appropriate way to evidence their need.

#### 4.4 Band C – No Housing Need

All other applicants for re-housing

Applicants who do not provide evidence of their re-housing circumstances upon application will be put in band C. Exceptions to this are cases of hate crime or domestic violence where providing proof may be difficult, these cases will be placed in Band B or Band A as outlined above.

#### 4.5 Preference within Band

Applications within band will be considered in date order with the exception of medical priority for ground floor accommodation as described above.

The relevant date will be the date that band status is confirmed and not original date of application. Where an applicant changes band because of a change of circumstances the relevant date will be the date that the new band status is confirmed except where applicants are trading down to band C (no need).

#### 4.6 Re-housing for Existing Tenants and Management Transfers

##### Management Transfers

There will be rare occasions when vacant properties may not be advertised in the normal way. In such circumstances individual properties can be withheld from the normal re-housing route and utilised to meet the needs of individual households. The two broad categories for management route moves are: a) to enable the appropriate management of the stock and b) to manage risk.

There must be very clear reasons as to why a property need's to be allocated to an individual / household outside the normal process as the audit of allocations are closely scrutinised. For example, to ensure that accommodation is secured as a matter of urgency or where there is a clear need to maintain a tight control over the re-housing location.

A management transfer is an emergency or immediate allocation into an available property within the Association's stock. It is only considered in exceptional circumstances, as outlined below.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Authorising Officer(s)</b>
Management Transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Single / couple in large family accommodation who require smaller</li></ul>	Neighbourhood Coordinator and

	<p>property. Supports down-sizing initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to deal with exceptional cases of Anti Social Behaviour and Harassment, including Serious or targeted hate crimes and serious racial harassment, where the ASB has been investigated and prolonged/targeted abuse is having a significant impact on the victim's quality of life. This to be done in clear view of alternative remedies and in line with broad principles of tackling ASB and in the clear interest of community safety.</li> <li>• Elderly or disabled customers living in accommodation where severe hardship is incurred through the unsuitability of current dwelling. These will transfer on a like for like basis.</li> </ul>	<p>Neighbourhood Manager provide recommendation. Final authorisation from Regional Manager.</p>
--	---	---

The Neighbourhood Coordinator is required to investigate the eligibility of the management transfer as per the criteria outlined above, and to obtain approval from the Regional Manager before authorising the move. The Neighbourhood Coordinator is required to provide relevant information to enable decision and authorisation for the management transfer. A suitable property must also be identified and considered for letting before authorisation is given. This must be evidenced in the GPHG application form and IBS diary page, the process is outlined in Appendix 2.

The information given by the Neighbourhood Coordinator to the Regional Manager should highlight:

- The reasons for such a move being sought
- The type of property required
- Any particular issues or sensitivities that need to be taken into account when identifying an appropriate (or in some cases "least inappropriate") property.

The Regional Manager may take into account other tenancy matters when deciding to authorise a management transfer, and may use these to refuse the transfer request, depending on the level of risk associated with the move. The following may result in refusal of the transfer:

- The tenant owes significant rent arrears and/or is failing to comply with a current or past re-payment agreement or possession order.
- The tenant has been convicted for using the property for an illegal or immoral purpose.

- The tenant or members of their household have caused nuisance and annoyance to neighbours or visitors.
- The tenant or members of their household have committed certain criminal offences in or near the home and still posing a threat to neighbours or the community.
- The tenant has been found to be violent towards a partner or members of the family.
- The tenant has allowed the condition of the property to deteriorate.
- The tenant has allowed any furniture provided by the landlord to deteriorate due to ill treatment.

Neighbourhood Managers in consultation with their Neighbourhood Coordinators and Neighbourhood Officers, and if appropriate other support workers, will help identify a property. Depending on the complexities of the case a multi-agency assessment may be required regarding the suitability of the property. If suitable, and once authorisation is provided, the property can then be offered and allocated directly outside of the normal expressions of interest/nominations. If the offer is refused by the applicant the reasons for refusal will be considered by the Neighbourhood Coordinator and Neighbourhood Manager. If these are deemed to be unreasonable reasons for refusal, the customer will be required to engage in re-housing via the normal channels outlined in this policy.

#### Re-housing for Existing Tenants

Great Places Housing Group will also consider transfer requests from tenants who have been resident for a minimum of 1 year (except in exceptional circumstances as agreed by the Neighbourhood Manager). Transfer applications are prioritised in the same priority system as the waiting list, however Great Places will aim to ensure that 10% of vacancies after nominations agreements have been satisfied are allocated to transfer applicants.

Applicants for transfer will be visited by their Neighbourhood Co-ordinator to confirm their priority and ensure that:

- There is no damage/re-chargeable repairs to the property
- There are no rent arrears or other charges owing
- There is no current action being taken against the applicant or a member of their household because of Anti-Social Behaviour
- The tenancy has been conducted satisfactorily

Applicants for transfer will need to complete the standard Great Places Housing Group application form, indicating that they are a current tenant wishing to be considered for a transfer.

## **5. The Regional Lettings Plan**

Great Places Housing Group will rotate offers of accommodation between the bands according to the regional lettings plan devised annually. This can take

account of lettings across the region or local authority areas, neighbourhoods and individual schemes can be considered separately as appropriate to the region.

The regional lettings plan will take account of:

- The likely level of hand over of newly developed properties over the next twelve months
- Likely turn over in existing properties over the next twelve months
- The type of stock available for letting
- The proportion of stock that will be offered to local authority nominations over the next twelve month
- The number of households on each waiting list band waiting for that area

Taking all this into account, the plan will set quotas for the proportion of properties to be offered to applicants in each of the bands. The regional lettings plan will also address whether sensitive lets are required to promote sustainability in certain areas, which could result in the need to override applicants on the housing waiting list.

In some circumstances it may be deemed appropriate to suspend the needs banding system.

*See Appendix A - Lettings Plan by Region*

## **6. Offer of Accommodation**

Multiple offers of accommodation of up to five applicants may be made, and applicants within the band to be made the offer will be considered in strict date order except where sensitive lets are applied according to the regional lettings plan or if the property is a ground floor flat or bungalow which would suit an applicant with accepted medical need for a ground floor property.

A property to be let from the direct list must be attempted to be let via two rounds of multiple offers before alternative means to let are applied which could include advertising via local or sub-regional CBL, registering on 'Homes Available now Lists, or offering up generally to everyone remaining on the waiting list. In the latter circumstance the interested applicant with the earliest queue date should be offered the property

## **7. Sustainable Communities**

As part of Great Places Housing Group's strategy to promote sustainable communities by taking swift and effective action against anti-social behaviour, all new tenants are granted a 'starter tenancy' for the first twelve months of their tenancy. During this period the tenancy will be monitored for breaches of tenancy or unsatisfactory conduct. If the tenancy is not conducted in a satisfactory manner during this period the starter tenancy will be terminated.

Where tenancies are not brought to an end they will automatically revert to a periodic assured tenancy after twelve months.

Where action is to be taken to terminate a starter tenancy, the tenant will have the right to appeal against this decision.

Whilst on a starter tenancy an applicant may not register for re-housing unless there are exceptional circumstances, for example Threat of Violence.

*See Great Places Housing Group Starter Tenancy Policy*

## **8. Lettings Made Outside the Lettings Policy**

### **8.1 Local Authority Nominations**

Great Places Housing Group has a duty to assist local authority partners in discharging their housing duty and as such will offer a proportion of available vacancies to applicants nominated from the local authority housing waiting list subject to the terms of a nomination agreement.

*See Local Authority Nominations Procedure and Appendix 1*

### **8.2 Choice Based Lettings and Local Lettings Policies**

In many areas Great Places Housing Group is a partner in choice based lettings schemes with other landlords and in most cases (with the exception of Manchester) common allocations policies or mechanisms in place for properties let through the scheme. CBL schemes may be local or cover the wider sub-region.

Local lettings policies are designed to encourage sustainability in a local area, this could be to address a particular problem such as anti-social behaviour or to ensure a balanced community is maintained. A local lettings policy might restrict lets to certain types of applicant or may allocate available properties taking into account special criteria such as having a 'local connection'.

Local lettings policies will be established in consultation with local authority partners and other stakeholders, and will be reviewed annually to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs of the area for which they are in place and do not unnecessarily restrict access to housing. The Local Lettings Policy must receive approval from a Regional Manager and the Local Authority.

As such lettings made where Great Places Housing Group operates choice based lettings or a local lettings policy will be made outside the Lettings Policy.

In the case of lets made through the Manchester Common Housing Register/Manchester Move the Great Places Lettings Policy will apply

Great Places will report on and publish annually/bi-annually/quarterly information on lets made through CBL and local lettings policies.

### 8.3 Adapted Properties

Great Places Housing Group has a number of properties that have been specially adapted for households with a disabled person. These properties will only be let to households that can demonstrate a need for a property that has been adapted in this way.

Great Places Housing Group will not hold a separate list of applicants requiring adaptations, but will always seek nominations for properties of this type from the local authority housing register. All applicants including existing tenants should be advised to register with the local authority when requesting adapted property. Where it is felt that an existing tenant would benefit by transferring to a particular adapted property that has become vacant the Housing Officer should request that the local authority nominates that applicant to Great Places Housing Group for the new tenancy or in exceptional circumstances a management move may be agreed.

## **9. Monitoring and Information**

Lettings performance will be monitored against the Tenant Services Authority standards for lettings and appropriate performance targets will be set locally each year and monitored through the balanced scorecard.

Performance information and information on who properties are allocated to and via which means will be reported through My Greatplace quarterly/bi-annually/annually.

We will closely monitor nominations to ensure that quotas are maintained and provide information to partner authorities.

**Appendix 1 : Regional Lettings Plan**

**2010 – 2011**

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Nomination Agreement</b>	<b>Band A</b>	<b>Band B</b>	<b>Band C</b>
Oldham	100% First Choice Homes  (20% of these are "Open door")	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bolton	100% CBL	n/a	n/a	n/a
Manchester	50%	33%	33%	33%
Trafford	50%	20%	60%	20%
Knutsford	50%	20%	60%	20%
Sheffield				
Burnley	50% noms	33%	33%	33%
Bury				
Blackburn	100% CBL	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pendle	100% CBL	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hyndburn	100% CBL	n/a	n/a	n/a
Salford				
Rochdale				

- *Does not include Sub-Regional allocations in eligible areas (10%)*

## Appendix 2 : Recording details of Management Transfer cases

The Neighbourhood Coordinator must outline the reasons for the Management Transfer and the tenant must complete the GPHG application form, approval must then be obtained from the Regional Manager before authorising the move. This must all be evidenced in IBS diary page/application form.

