

Allocation Policy



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The allocations policy is used for managing lettings to low cost rental properties and applications for shared ownership properties.

Low cost rental accommodation

PropCo is committed to providing a range of quality affordable properties that will assist Local Authorities in the delivery of their housing strategies and to promote and enable choice of accommodation for people in housing need with limited housing options.

PropCo will ensure that access into the housing is on a fair and equitable basis while ensuring that allocations are made in line with sustainable lettings plans which optimise the best use of the assets. Properties are let in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements and with the intention of incurring minimal rent loss.

PropCo will encourage and promote social inclusion whilst creating sustainable communities and will promote choice for applicants by participating in local and regional choice based lettings schemes.

Objectives

PropCo's objectives in the allocation of its homes are to:

- Meet housing need and prevent homelessness by working in association with local authorities and other agencies
- Comply with current legislation and regulatory guidance 
- Create stable tenancies and sustainable communities
- Make best use of PropCo's stock in meeting the needs of potential and existing tenants and minimise void periods
- Ensure that the selection of applicants and the allocation of homes is transparent, fair and accountable 
- Offer choice to tenants over where they live while giving preference to those in priority need 
- Promote equal opportunities and value diversity 

Who we house

Our primary purpose as a Registered Provider is to provide accommodation for people in housing need who are unable to afford to buy or rent housing on the open market. It is expected that all applicants will meet the eligibility criteria. All applications for housing will be considered carefully before an offer of accommodation is made and in some cases we may request additional information.

Where prospective tenants require support to enable them to access or maintain a tenancy PropCo will take those needs into account and aim to provide the support required through our own services or through other agencies. Support needs will not be a bar to applicants providing that the necessary support can be provided.

Who we cannot house

By law, certain households (provided that they are not existing tenants) are not eligible, including:

- households subject to immigration control, including asylum seekers (although there are exceptions to this rule, each will be treated on its merit by the Local Authority responsible)
- households who have come from abroad and do not qualify for public funds (e.g. social security benefits).

Local Authorities also have powers to treat as ineligible any applicant who has behaved badly enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant. This may have happened in an existing or a previous tenancy. Examples of such behaviour include:

- repeated or significant non payment of rent
- certain breaches of tenancy conditions
- behaviour (either that of the applicant(s) or of someone living with or visiting them) that is likely to cause nuisance or annoyance to others
- using the home for immoral or illegal purposes
- committing an arrestable offence in or near the home
- serious neglect of the condition of the home
- getting a tenancy by providing false information or paying someone for it

An applicant who has behaved in such a way may be ineligible for allocation to a PropCo property. Applicants have the right to request a review of any decision on eligibility and a right to be informed in writing of the decision on review and clear grounds for that decision.

Choice Based Lettings

We will participate in local and regional choice based lettings schemes to give applicants greater choice in meeting their housing needs, within the context of any Local Lettings Plans adopted.

Applicants are expected to actively look for and express their interest in advertised vacant properties that they want to live in. This expression of interest is known as a 'bid'. Bidding will occur for all vacant properties advertised through a Choice Based Lettings scheme. The rules for bidding will be those that are set by the local Choice Based Lettings scheme.

PropCo, working with the Local Authority and other partner agencies, will assist applicants to express interest where they:

- Do not have access to the internet
- Have a disability or health condition that would prevent them from accessing the web site
- Are absent due to illness
- Require additional assistance

Where an applicant is put forward for accommodation through the Choice Based Letting scheme their individual circumstances will be considered prior to allocation in every case using

the information provided by the applicant on their application form and any information provided subsequently. The policy
Waiting list

Generally, it is not the intention of PropCo to hold a waiting list. The majority of properties will be let through Local Authority nominations and Choice Based Letting schemes. In exceptions where this is not possible then approved local referral agencies will be used.

Housing need and priority

As demand for affordable housing to rent is greater than the number of properties available, PropCo prioritises allocations of vacant properties to applicants in the greatest need. This system of prioritisation will be linked to Local Lettings plans where appropriate.

Generally, vacant housing will be offered to the top applicant identified through choice based lettings at the time of the vacancy, whose housing needs and requirements best match the property type available. However, in certain circumstances this may not be the case, for example, where a property has been adapted and that adaptation may be more suitable to an applicant with fewer points, or if the lifestyle of the applicant with the highest number of points is considered to be unsuitable for that property.

Where an offer to the top applicant is not made, this will be recorded together with the reason for the decision.

Where an offer of housing has been made and accepted and it transpires that the applicant has given false information we may commence legal action for repossession to end the tenancy.

References

Potential tenants nominated through Choice Based Lettings schemes will normally need to provide a satisfactory reference that demonstrates their ability to pay their rent and, where appropriate, how well they have conducted any previous tenancy held by them. The reference must be from a current landlord or where there is no current landlord, former landlord.

Applicants (including homeless persons) may not have to provide references. References will not normally be accepted from friends or family members except where there has been no other housing history. Applicants will be asked to consent to information being shared with other housing providers and housing service providers.

Identification and reference verification

Before an offer of accommodation is made, PropCo will need to be satisfied that information provided by the applicant at registration accurately reflects their housing circumstances. In most cases, this second verification process will be carried out shortly before an offer of accommodation is made.

Transfers

Existing PropCo tenants wishing to move to another PropCo property are subject to the same needs criteria as other applicants. However, where they live in a home that is in high demand,

or they are seriously under occupying a property and are prepared to move to properties in lesser demand or of a more appropriate size, then they may be given additional priority.

Decants

Where existing PropCo residents are required to move because essential works are to be carried out that cannot be undertaken with the residents in occupation, an offer of accommodation within permanent stock, in an area of choice for the tenant, will be provided where possible. However this will not always be possible due to lack of supply.

Mutual exchange

PropCo will subscribe to online services which will enable its tenants to seek a mutual exchange with another social housing tenant.

Number of offers

PropCo will not normally restrict the number of offers made. However where an offer is unreasonably refused by the applicant, further offers of the same type of property in the same area may not be made.

Tenants transferring and those being decanted will normally receive two reasonable offers of accommodation. For transfers, if offers are rejected tenants will be removed from the list and can only re-apply 12 months later unless there is a substantial change of circumstances. In the case of decants, PropCo would consider its legal position with regards to gaining possession.

A reasonable offer should meet the essential needs of the household e.g. in terms of size or level of accommodation. PropCo will note preferences for area and attempt to take this into account when offering property, but this may not always be possible.

Trade down incentives

PropCo recognises that for a variety of reasons, tenants may wish to “downsize”. Where tenants express interest in moving to a smaller property, incentives will be offered to make the transition smooth. “Downsizing” requests will not be approved where the move to a smaller property would result in statutory overcrowding.

Homes for people with a disability

These properties are usually purpose built or specially adapted for use by disabled people. When these properties become vacant, they are reserved for households needing the specialised facilities offered by the property, regardless of the priority of other applicants. However, where there is little interest, PropCo may choose to make these properties available for general purpose lets.

Pets

Except in the case of assistance dogs, applicants who own a dog will only be considered for properties that have their own ground level private entrance. Applicants for properties with a communal entrance should seek the written permission of PropCo if they wish to keep any other pet in their home.

Registered sex offenders

Registered sex offenders are required to inform PropCo when they apply for housing that they are a registered sex offender as it is a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 for offenders to withhold this information. The risk posed by Sex Offenders cannot be assessed by PropCo who will be guided on this by agencies charged with the management and monitoring of sex offenders including the police and social workers.

When we may not offer accommodation

There are a small number of people that PropCo will not allow to live in our homes. This helps PropCo to provide a better quality of life for all of its customers and the wider community.

PropCo may not re-house people in the following circumstances, if the applicant, the applicant's spouse, partner or someone who lives with the applicant:

- has been evicted from a social letting in the past
- owe PropCo or another Registered Provider money and has not made and kept to an agreement to pay this debt
- have been subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or ASB injunction
- Pose a threat to the community
- Has previously failed to maintain a probationary tenancy
- Has given false information on the application form or during an interview to obtain one of our homes
- Has been evicted from interim housing and has made themselves homeless
- Has sensory or physical impairments and need help from external agencies to help them sustain a tenancy but have refused such help
- Has serious mental health problems that result in them being unable to sustain a tenancy even with assistance from specialist support agencies

Appeal against ineligibility

If an applicant is unhappy with the decision not to grant a tenancy, their complaint will be dealt with in line with the Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Lettings

All new tenants will be provided with a copy of

- The tenancy agreement
- The support agreement (if relevant)
- The tenants handbook
- Relevant fire safety information
- Property information such as user manuals, any relevant warranty period for fixtures.
- Contact details for PropCo's management provider relevant to the property

Tenure

Starter tenancies will be offered to all new tenants. This will be a 12 month Assured Shorthold

Tenancy which will be reviewed to determine if the tenancy has been satisfactorily maintained. If a further tenancy is offered, then this will be for a fixed term of five years. A starter tenancy may be extended in accordance with the terms of the tenancy agreement.

Joint tenancies

PropCo will grant joint-named tenancies on all occasions when individuals seek housing as a couple, unless any one of the joint tenants are ineligible for accommodation in which case a joint tenancy will not be granted.

Confidentiality

The privacy of applicants will be respected and care will be taken to maintain confidentiality in line with confidentiality and data protection laws. However, responsible information sharing can play a key role in the letting of our homes. Information sharing protocols with local authorities and partners will be followed where they are in place.

Relevant information from landlords, doctors, etc. may need to be obtained and applicants are required to sign a declaration giving permission for this to be done.

Shared ownership accommodation

This policy is aligned with requirements for shared ownership sales allocations set out in the Homes and Communities Agency's Capital Funding Guide.

Shared Ownership offers households the opportunity to buy a share of a property whilst paying rent on the part they do not own. Initial shares sold will be between 25% and 75% of the value of the home. If the lease allows it, households can usually choose to buy larger shares until they own the property outright.

This policy will ensure that:

- Shared ownership properties developed for sale or offered for resale by PropCo will be made available to people who are eligible and cannot afford to buy a home suitable for their needs on the open market
- Our shared ownership homes are offered to applicants in a fair and transparent manner
- PropCo complies with financial and regulatory controls relating to the allocation and sale of shared ownership properties

Eligibility

To be eligible for a shared ownership property, applicants must:

- Have a household income of less than £80,000 (or £90,000 in London) and be otherwise unable to purchase a property suitable to meet their housing needs on the open market
- Be able to fund the deposit and other purchase costs through savings or other funds

- Not own or have an interest in another property (although households may apply while they are selling or discharging interest in another property, including a shared ownership property)

Viewings and applications

Households must apply for the shared ownership scheme and also apply for the specific property they wish to purchase.

Households interested in purchasing a shared ownership property should apply to register with the relevant HomeBuy agent in the first instance, who will check their eligibility for the shared ownership scheme.

All our properties for sale will be advertised through the relevant HomeBuy agent. Households should indicate their interest in specific PropCo properties by using the form available on our website. Property viewings will be arranged for potential applicants by us or our agent.

Households wishing to apply for a property should complete and submit an application to an independent mortgage broker, who will conduct an affordability assessment.

If a joint application is made both applicants must become joint owners i.e. be named on the lease and on any mortgage on the property

There is no restriction on the number of applications a household can make for PropCo properties.

Allocations criteria and process

Affordability

We will assess whether applicants are able to afford the mortgage, rent and other costs of being a homeowner without hardship. We will also carry out credit checks on applicants.

Prioritisation

Allocations will be managed in line with the s106 agreement relevant to the individual property or other agreement with the local authority. This may specify that applicants must have a connection to the local area or that priority must be given to such households. We will advise households of any criteria that restrict allocations or determine prioritisation of applications when we advertise properties and when we process applications.

After applying local planning requirements we will give priority to armed forces personnel who are currently serving or who have left service in the two years prior to their application. This is in line with government guidelines on allocation of shared ownership properties.

Where there are no restrictions imposed by planning or funding conditions, we will prioritise completed applications from non-armed forces personnel in the order in which we receive them. A completed application is one which has been approved by the independent mortgage broker and is accompanied by all the required supporting information.

We will not accept further applications for a property after it has been allocated.

Fees

When applicants have been offered a new build property and wish to proceed, we will ask for a non-refundable reservation fee of £250. This will be deducted from the purchase price when the sale completes.

Time scales

For sales of new build properties we normally expect exchange of contracts within four weeks of receiving a reservation fee unless other timescales are specified. Completion should take place two weeks afterwards, subject to the completion date of the development. We may withdraw an offer of sale if these timescales are unreasonably delayed by the purchaser.

For resale homes, the timescales will be agreed between purchaser and seller.

Leases

All shared owners will be issued with a standard shared ownership lease with an initial term of 125 years. A lease will be issued whether the leaseholder has purchased a flat or a house.

Where a shared owner's lease states an approach to rents that is different from this policy, the lease takes precedence.

Sales and lettings to staff, board members or their relatives

Where a member of PropCo staff or board, or their close relative, applies for accommodation, Board approval must be given before an allocation or sale can be made. A report will be made to the Board for decision. This also applies to any other member of the L&G group of companies.

Appeals and complaints

Any applicant or leaseholder who feels that they have not been treated in accordance with this policy can appeal using the complaints procedure.

Policy review

The board will review this policy every two years. The board of PropCo will consider and take into account the housing policies of Local Council when reviewing the policy.

Accountable Director	Shaun Holdcroft
Approval Date	July 2019
Review Date	July 2021 <i>(or subject to any changes in regulatory, legislative and/or areas of best practise where a review is required sooner than the stipulated review date)</i>

