

## Women's Pioneer Housing Allocations and Lettings Policy

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. WPH as a small, specialist housing association has a limited resource of a high demand product – homes for independent women. We need to balance the evolving housing needs of our existing residents with meeting the immediate housing needs of new residents including our commitment to the local authorities we work with.

### 2. Purpose

- 2.1. This policy sets our approach to allocations and lettings of general needs and sheltered housing.

### 3. Our Policy

- 3.1. Whichever route a new letting takes place through we will conduct an affordability, suitability and right to rent check for the new tenancy. In some situations we will decline sign ups where we reasonably believe either the tenancy will be unaffordable or unsuitable for the resident. In these scenarios we will always explain our reasoning and provide housing advice. Full details are outlined in the Allocations and Lettings Procedure.
- 3.2. At the point of a new tenancy, the tenant must have an ongoing right to rent and not a limited leave to remain.
- 3.3. The four ways we will let a property are;
- fulfilling our nominations agreements with the local authority,
  - internal transfer of an existing tenant,

- our public waiting list for women not eligible for local authority housing and
  - through referral agencies working with women who wouldn't otherwise have access to affordable housing.
- 3.4. All ground floor flats will be allocated to a transfer applicant who has a need to move to a ground floor to maintain their independence or their safety. In exceptional circumstances we may let a ground floor flat through other routes, such as the transfer list being exhausted or a requirement to meet our nominations agreement.
- 3.5. We will not allocate a tenant to a flat in a building with a lift if the resident cannot physically manage stairs (e.g. wheelchair user or bedbound) this is to ensure they can evacuate in the event of a fire.
- 3.6. In some cases we may apply management discretion when allocating a property.
- 3.7. **Nominations from the local authority**
- 3.7.1. We will endeavour to create nominations agreements with local authorities which allow for WPH to play our role in housing homeless women while creating mixed communities through allocations from the waiting list and referral agencies. All nomination agreements will stipulate we will only accept women.
- 3.7.2. We will benchmark our nomination agreements with other local housing providers to ensure we are not over committing.
- 3.7.3. We will use our relationships with local authorities to ensure as quick as possible nominations and sign ups.
- 3.8. **Internal transfer**
- 3.8.1. Many of our residents wish to move home and remain a WPH tenant. The demand for a move far exceeds the supply of void properties available each year.

### **Eligibility for transfer**

- 3.8.2. A tenant seeking a transfer:
- Must have completed a starter tenancy

- must not have a rent debt including cyclical arrears
- must not owe any other money to Women's Pioneer such as recoverable repair charges
- must not have breached the terms of the tenancy resulting in Women's Pioneer commencing legal action or obtaining a Court Order
- must have kept the property in good condition and order
- must not have transferred to their current property within the last 12 months

Tenants may be able to transfer in some exceptional circumstances if:

- tenant has an overriding medical condition which requires her to move
- cannot afford the rent or can more easily pay off rent arrears by moving to cheaper accommodation
- is under-occupying her present accommodation and wishes to move to a smaller property
- if the transfer is due to a decant for or redevelopment
- If the move avoids harassment or domestic violence.

3.8.3. The following prioritisation method is used for transfer applicants:

1. Management transfer: an urgent need to move to remove the tenant from the risk of harm.
2. Tenant is being decanted from a property due to repairs or redevelopment
3. Medical category A
4. Downsizing and giving up two bedrooms
5. Overcrowded need two extra bedrooms
6. Medical category B
7. Downsizing and giving up one bedroom
8. Overcrowded need one extra bedroom
9. Medical category C
10. Everyone else

3.8.4. Some residents will meet more than one category and in those cases residents who meet two categories will hold higher priority than those that meet one. In cases where a tenant meets three or more, we will add up the categories to ensure the priority order is correct. Management transfers and decants will usually be transferred before residents who meet two or more of the other categories.

3.8.5. In exceptional circumstances we will prioritise decants over residents at risk of harm if this decant is urgently required to facilitate the delivery of new homes.

- 3.8.6. We will also consider the best use of the housing stock, for example where transferring a tenant may release a flat which is needed for a high priority applicant.
- 3.8.7. If a tenant receives management transfer status they will be made up to two offers under this status before losing it. Both offers must be reasonable, for example like for like in size or larger, in a postcode selected by the tenant and on a floor they can physically manage.
- 3.8.8. We will work with other housing providers and the local authority where a tenant has an urgent need to move and we have not got suitable property (e.g. ground floor, disability adapted, out of borough, two or three bedrooms etc.).
- 3.8.9. In cases of overcrowding we will not facilitate a transfer for household members who have subsequently moved into the property since the tenancy was granted, e.g. adult children or elderly parents.

### **Under-occupation incentive**

- 3.8.10. Tenants who are under-occupying their home. i.e. have one or more bedrooms more than they need can be eligible for a payment for moving.
- 3.8.11. Tenants wanting to downsize from a one bedroom home to a studio flat are not eligible.
- 3.8.12. Women's Pioneer will pay £1,000 for each extra bedroom given up e.g. a person moving from a three bedroomed home to a one bedroomed home will receive a payment of £2000. We will also pay a fixed fee of £500 towards the cost of moving to cover removals, gas and electricity connection, carpets and curtains.
- 3.8.13. If a tenant owes Women's Pioneer Housing money for rent or rechargeable repairs for example, the incentive payment will be used to reduce or clear the debt. As an example, if a tenant owes £250 in rent and is giving up one bedroom the payment will be £750 instead of £1000. However, any remaining debt must still be cleared before any transfer can take place.

### **3.9. Waiting list**

- 3.9.1. We will operate waiting lists, available for women to join if they live in long term and ongoing unsuitable accommodation which is unresolvable through the applicant's means or through local authority support.

3.9.2. Waiting list tenants will be only be offered studio flats (as opposed to one bedroom properties).

3.9.3. The criteria to join the waiting list for Collingham Gardens is:

- Aged under 35
- Income below £40,000 per annum
- Savings below £16,000
- A demonstrable need for women's housing
- Not eligible for housing support from the local authority
- Does not own or have a share of a property anywhere else.

3.9.4. The criteria to join the waiting list for general needs is:

- Aged 35 to 59
- Income below £40,000 per annum
- Savings below £16,000
- A demonstrable need for women's housing
- Not eligible for housing support from the local authority
- Does not own or have a share of a property anywhere else.

3.9.5. The criteria to join the waiting list for sheltered housing is:

- Aged 60 or over
- Income below £40,000 per annum
- Savings below £16,000
- A demonstrable need for women's housing
- A demonstrable need for sheltered accommodation
- Not eligible for housing support from the local authority
- Does not own or have a share of a property anywhere else.

3.9.6. Each waiting list will be prioritised based on current housing situation, how long term the housing need has been and a demonstrable need for women's housing.

3.9.7. WPH commit to advertising the waiting list to a wide range of female audiences, how this is done may vary over time.

3.10. **Referral agencies**

- 3.10.1. We will work with a wide range of referral agencies to house women with urgent housing needs. This includes agencies helping a range of women such as young women suitable for Collingham Gardens accommodation and older women suitable for sheltered accommodation.
- 3.10.2. The referral agencies we work with will vary over time and be regularly reviewed on the criteria that the agency can support WPH to meet our purpose of making a positive difference to women's lives.
- 3.10.3. In particular, we will prioritise referrals for women who specifically need women led housing.
- 3.10.4. We will also annually review the referral agency's nomination's tenancy success on the following grounds:
- Clear rent account at six months
  - No reported ASB/all ASB resolved at six months
  - Access given for any repair or safety checks at six months
  - Proportion of starter tenancies converted to fixed term tenancies at 12 months (should be 90% plus)
- 3.10.5. We will remove a referral agency from our list should they no longer meet the criteria outlined above. Equally should we encounter a new referral agency who meets our criteria we will add them to our list, accept referrals and appraise them regularly on the criteria outlined above.
- 3.10.6. We will consider the property type, surrounding neighbours and neighbourhood when making allocations in order to create balanced communities which meet the needs of existing and future residents.
- 3.10.7. A clear decision making, application making and appeals process is outlined in the Allocations and Lettings Procedure.

### **3.11. Mutual exchange**

- 3.11.1. We aim to support residents to move home through mutual exchanges, this will include providing advice and support throughout the process as well as working with partners to widen the pool of women's housing swaps available. The details of how we facilitate these swaps is outlined in the Allocations and Lettings Procedure.
- 3.11.2. All residents who wish to exchange must have no rent arrears, including cyclical arrears or recoverable repair charges and the incoming tenant must match the size of property (e.g. will not overcrowd or under-occupy).

