



**Aspire Housing's Lettings Policy – How we Let our Homes  
2014**

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### **Section 1 - Aims of the Policy**

We are committed to providing a lettings service that is fair, efficient and easy for people to understand and that also complies with the relevant legislation and regulatory framework for social housing.

We aim to let our homes quickly and to offer choice to customers by giving them an opportunity to express their preference for the area and type of housing that they want to live in. We do this by allocating our homes via a choice based lettings system.

We aim to take into account the housing needs and aspirations of our current tenants and their changing needs by facilitating transfers and promoting mobility and exchange schemes.

We will co-operate with our local authority partners and their strategic housing function by meeting obligations contained in nominations agreements.

We aim to contribute to the development of balanced and sustainable communities, acknowledging community contribution and giving some priority to people in employment or those who are volunteering on a regular basis. We may develop local lettings plans and criteria to promote greater stability in some areas. Such criteria will clearly be marked in property advertisements

### **Section 2 - Access to an Aspire home**

We have local authority nominations agreements in place with our local authority partners which are generally in respect of 75% of vacancies for Newcastle-under-Lyme and 50% in Stoke-on-Trent. Similar arrangements will apply where we manage properties in other areas. In order to be considered for these vacancies customers will need to apply with the relevant local authority and

will be assessed according to the Council's priorities. Each local authority will use its own method for selecting nominations to Aspire Housing and criteria for rejecting such nominations will be contained within Service Level Agreements

The remaining percentage of vacancies will be let to current tenants who need to move as well as to new customers in accordance with the criteria contained **within this policy**. Priority will be given to customers who can evidence community contribution and any additional requirements/criteria will also be clearly marked on the property adverts.

We will use the HomeHunt website ([www.homehunt.co.uk](http://www.homehunt.co.uk)) to advertise these vacancies so that customers can clearly see what homes are available. Internet access will be available to customers at our Contact Centre in Merrial Street, Newcastle alongside officer support.

We are committed to providing mobility for our customers and if you are a current Aspire Assured tenant we will provide you with access to the HomeSwapper service free of charge, to search for a suitable swap (or mutual exchange), not only with other Aspire customers but also with residents from other registered providers and councils across the country. Tenants who do not fall within the bands explained within this policy will be expected to pursue this option.

### **Section 3 - Who can apply?**

The law requires housing agencies to assume responsibility for checking the immigration status of applicants to ensure entitlement to housing. All such assessments will be completed in accordance with the relevant legislation and applied fairly:

- Customers applying direct to Aspire will generally need to be over the age of 18
- Customers will not need to have a local connection to apply for particular properties apart from where there are planning or specific requirements in place, but priority may be given to those with a local connection prior to those with no local connection. Local connection means permanent residence in the local authority area of the property advertised for at least the past six months or three out of the last five years. Temporary residence at supported accommodation or on licence will not constitute a local connection
- We value good tenants, and where possible we will gather references from current or previous landlords
- We will not re-house customers who own a property unless there is a legitimate reason why the property cannot continue to be occupied as the principle home for example on medical grounds, **and** the property cannot be sold to resolve the housing need. This may include where there is negative or no equity in the property or where a customer has specific needs for example requires Sheltered or Extra Care accommodation. We will consider such applications on a case by case basis prior to any offer being made
- Owner occupiers who are approved for rehousing must also be able to demonstrate that their house is on the market and that they are actively looking to sell, prior to any offer being made. Checks may be made at a later date to verify the sale
- Some customers may be required to attend pre-tenancy training sessions, for example, where they have not held a previous tenancy, there is evidence of a failed tenancy or where we identify that there may be a high risk of tenancy failure

- Customers will be required to provide up to date income details prior to any offers being made to make sure that new tenancies are affordable for the resident/s moving in. In some circumstances we may complete a credit reference to validate information provided. Where an affordability calculation shows that the customer will not be able to afford the rent then a tenancy will not be granted. We may work with such customers to help them into a financial position to be able to afford a tenancy
- Customers will be eligible for the number of bedrooms contained in the government's Welfare Reform criteria but Aspire will also allow a degree of under occupation in respect of certain properties. This will be subject to affordability assessments and confirmation that customers can pay the full rent without Housing Benefit. This will be clearly marked in the property adverts
- Aspire may grant a tenancy to officers and officers relatives, members or employees of the organisation. The individual will be treated no more favourably than any other customer and any offer of tenancy will be authorised by an Aspire Manager. Where the beneficiary is a member of staff the benefit will be recorded in the Company's register of interests
- Where an application has been made by giving false, misleading or withholding information the applicant may be excluded from applying for an Aspire home. In the instance that a tenancy has already been granted that tenancy may be terminated and a fine imposed.

#### **Section 4 - Exclusions**

The criteria in Section 3 will be applied and in certain circumstances we will refuse applications for housing. We will be fair and transparent in our decision making process and demonstrate our reasons for refusal. Customers excluded or suspended from the register will be informed of the reason and provided with information on a right of appeal. The following are examples of reasons for refusal:-

- Those who are not considered able to conduct a tenancy without appropriate support and where this support is not available. This may include non-engagement with support workers or where customers are living in supported accommodation but are not ready to move to an independent tenancy
- Where there is evidence of anti-social behaviour or serious unacceptable behaviour
- Non-payment of rent or housing related debt in respect of current or previous tenancies/licences
- Customers who have failed to conduct a current or previous tenancy or licence in a satisfactory manner
- Customers who do not meet the affordability assessment and will not be able to pay their rent
- Owner occupiers unless specific circumstances apply as detailed in Section 3
- Where customers have provided false information or deliberately withheld information
- Persons convicted of certain criminal offences subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

#### **Section 5 - Transfer Applications**

Aspire tenants in defined housing need can apply to move to another property within the Housing Group. Residents will need to contact us to discuss the reasons they are considering a move so that appropriate advice can be given regarding the options available. Key workers may be

assigned to assist customers through the transfer process and referral may be made to our “in-house” Occupational Therapist to assist with assessment of medical and mobility needs

A separate Transfer Policy is in place to manage the transfer process but to summarise, the following conditions will apply to all transfer applicants:

- Transfer applicants must have held their tenancy for a period of 12 months prior to being accepted for a transfer, unless there has been a significant change in circumstances since the commencement of tenancy
- Tenants who do not fall within the housing need criteria contained in this policy will not be eligible for a transfer but Assured Tenants will have free access to the HomeSwapper service to search for a mutual exchange
- Transfer requests will only be considered if the tenancy has been conducted in a satisfactory manner. Examples of unsatisfactory conduct:
  - Where the tenant or household member is in breach of tenancy conditions or where there are investigations relating to tenancy conduct including rent arrears, service charge arrears or recharges
  - Neighbour nuisance or anti-social behaviour

Before any transfer will be authorised a property inspection will be completed. To meet the required standard the property must be:

- Clean and tidy and in a good state of decoration. This means no extensive damage to wallpaper, walls must not be badly marked or stained and decoration should not be of such a strong colour that it cannot be easily covered up.
- Lawns and hedges must be cut.
- Any improvement works that have been made to the property by the tenant must have had permission from Aspire in writing and be completed
- All fittings and fixtures, including kitchen units, heating systems, doors, handles and so on must be in their original condition and any damage identified should be due to “fair wear and tear” i.e. normal day to day use.

There may be exceptions to the above in certain circumstances, which will be considered on a case by case basis.

Where there is evidence of unsatisfactory conduct and customers are in breach of their tenancy agreement, tenancy enforcement action may be taken which could lead to eviction.

## **Section 6 - How we prioritise applications**

We use a simple banding scheme to prioritise applications - BAND A, B and C - and each applicant is assessed according to their circumstances and placed into one of the 3 bands.

Aspire values customers who play a part in their local community, making it a good place to live and work in, and wants to reward them for their contribution. We call this a Community Contribution award.

Customers eligible for the Community Contribution award in respect of our general needs vacancies (ie not properties for the over 55's) will be given priority within our BAND B and BAND C categories. Subsequent priority is by registration date order within the respective category.

### **BAND A - transferring tenants of Aspire requiring an emergency move:**

- Where there is an urgent need to move and evidence of serious threat to personal safety
- Households who are unable to return to their home from hospital because their current home is permanently unsuitable
- Households requiring a permanent or temporary decant as agreed with the Neighbourhood Management Team
- Where there is a legal obligation to re-house into suitable alternative accommodation as agreed with the Neighbourhood Management Team
- Where customers are under occupying their current accommodation in accordance with the Welfare Reform size criteria and need to move on hardship grounds
- Exceptional Circumstances as agreed by the Service Manager eg due to serious Child Protection issues

### **BAND B - transferring tenants of Aspire with a defined housing need with top priority awarded to those with Community Contribution (for general needs vacancies) followed by registration date within this band. Defined housing need will be assessed according to the following criteria:-**

- Households who are affected by health and/or mobility issues where their current accommodation is having a serious adverse effect on their health
- Households assessed as requiring a Disabled Facilities Grant but moving would be a more efficient way to meet their needs
- Households who are residing in an adapted property that they no longer need
- Households who are under occupying their current accommodation in accordance with our property eligibility criteria
- Households who are overcrowded in their current accommodation in accordance with our property eligibility criteria
- Households who can evidence a need to move on care/support/welfare grounds **or** where a move would contribute to better use of Aspire's housing stock, for example by releasing a high demand or chain vacancy. Such applications will be considered on a case by case basis

### **BAND C - Non Aspire tenants with top priority awarded to those with Community Contribution (for general needs vacancies) followed by registration date within this band**

Community Contribution will be considered on a case by case basis for our general needs properties and applies where the applicant or joint applicant is able to demonstrate the following criteria:-

- Is currently in employment for a minimum of 16 hours a week and has been in regular employment for the past three months or more or
- Is volunteering for 6 or more hours a week for a recognised organisation and has done so for at least 6 months\* or
- Is undertaking work preparation training on a regular basis (eg ongoing attendance at Job Clubs, Employment focused workshops and training) or
- Is an approved foster carer who needs to move to a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child

\*Recognised organisations include eg registered charities, Aspire Group, or other community and voluntary organisations.

Customers awarded this priority will be subject to affordability assessments, tenancy references and checks in the normal manner. They will be asked to provide proof that they meet the criteria, either through provision of payslips or a letter from employer, trainer or volunteer manager.

### **Section 7 – Advertising vacant homes**

Available properties will be advertised on the HomeHunt website ([www.homehunt.co.uk](http://www.homehunt.co.uk)) at regular intervals. Advertising cycles may vary but will be clearly marked on the property adverts. Adverts will generally state how long the advert is “open” for but dependent on the amount of interest in a particular property the advert may sometimes stay open for longer or be closed earlier.

Customers may make unlimited expressions of interest and our staff may assist you with this.

On occasion there may be a requirement to make an allocation of a specific property to an applicant where there is a particular urgency for the applicant to move. These properties will not be advertised via Homehunt and will be classified as “direct lets”.

### **Section 8 - How we decide who is successful**

Expressions of interest will be placed in Priority Order with customers in BAND A ranked first, followed by BAND B and finally BAND C. Some properties may be advertised for transfer customers only or waiting list customers only, but these will be clearly labelled on the adverts.

Verification of circumstances will be carried out at the expression of interest stage to make sure that the household is eligible for the property advertised and in accordance with the relevant criteria. Verification includes proofs of individual household members; address history; references; income details and other relevant information relating to the property advertised. Offers will not be made where it is evident that the property concerned does not meet the medical or mobility requirements of the applicant, or where the type of accommodation is not suitable, for example, following sheltered scheme assessments.

### **Section 9 - Refusal of properties**

Customers who make an unreasonable refusal of a suitable offer or who do not respond to an offer within the required timescale may have their application suspended for a period of six months. These decisions will be considered on a case by case basis by an authorised manager.

### **Section 10 - Appeals**

Customers who are unhappy with a decision relating to their application can appeal and this will be dealt with in line with Aspire Housing's Appeals Procedure.