

LETTINGS POLICY

Customer Services and Care & Support

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------



1. Purpose

Riverside are committed to ensuring that properties are offered to potential customers, the majority of whom are unable to secure a home on the open market, in an efficient, customer focused and timely manner. This policy also aims to help us make the best use of our housing stock to achieve mixed, sustainable communities.

Riverside aims to ensure that applicants can access clear information on how to apply and obtain housing, and the services and standards they can expect from us.

Riverside has housing stock over a large geographical area, located in many local authority areas. There are a variety of arrangements for the allocation of these properties, in line with nomination agreements with Local Authorities, Section 106 Agreements* and any approved, local lettings plans.. Riverside will seek to co-operate with local authorities strategic housing functions in line with the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard and the general requirement on the Registered Provider to assist local authorities to discharge their statutory duties (section 170 Housing Act 1996). In addition to nomination agreements, we have referral / third party arrangements in place with partner organisations in line with our Ending Homelessness Strategy and make a small percentage of properties available each year for these schemes.

* Section 106 refers to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and will usually mean that planning consent for a particular development was approved in part due to an agreement that homes would only be allocated to applicants living or working in the locality.

2. Scope

This policy applies to lettings of General Needs (England) and Retirement Living Intermediate, Social and Affordable Rent homes. It does not apply to homes in Scotland, Supported Housing Schemes and Care Services, Market Rent and Shared Ownership homes, or garages.

3. Principles

The guiding principles of this policy are:

- Openness, fairness and efficiency
- Affordability
- To provide a positive experience for customers, through excellent communication, efficient ways of working and clear outcomes
- Adherence to Riverside Equality & Diversity principles
- Assessment of priority on the basis of housing need

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------



- Sustainability of neighbourhoods
- To enable customers to exercise choice and preferences where possible
- To check eligibility for housing, previous tenancy conduct and references to enable us to identify tenancy support needs and with specific provision for suspensions and appeals
- Cooperation with local authorities in meeting their responsibilities towards homeless households and those in housing need, working with our local authority partners to ensure that their schemes have mechanisms in place so they are accessible to all customers
- Suitability of properties to meet the needs of individual households
- To adopt a marketing and letting approach to get the right property for the right customer, using a range of channels
- To allow for flexibility to enable us to meet demand or urgent/specific needs that are identified for example; homelessness, victims of hate crime and domestic abuse, demolition or redevelopment
- To maximise opportunities to help people to move and access alternative options to meet changing circumstances either within Riverside or with partner organisations
- To apply a right first time approach to allocations to deliver a positive customer experience whilst minimising waste and service failures
- To ensure long term organisational viability
- To improve our services through feedback and consultation with current customers and partners, and analysis of the impact and outcomes we have achieved
- Adherence to the Regulator of Social Housing regulatory standards
- Compliance with all legal requirements

4. Operation

4.1 Each Social Housing Region will have a Regional Allocations Strategy, which sets out how homes within their area of operation will be allocated, and any criteria that will be applied when determining the allocation route, in line with the following:

- (i) **Local Authority Nominations**, which may be received as either a nomination, or through the Choice-Based Lettings Scheme in operation. Under the terms set out in each local authority agreements, a percentage of all general needs homes must be offered to each authority's housing department. This percentage will

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------



normally be 100% for all new builds and at least 50% but no more than 75% of relets.

Allocations to nominated applicants will be subject to the local authority's own Allocations and Letting Scheme Policy, however each nomination will be subject to our standard Pre-tenancy Application assessment, and we reserve the right to refuse a nomination in accordance with our Suspensions Procedure or, in the case of a vulnerable person, if there is not an appropriate support package in place.

- (ii) Any **Local Lettings Plans**, which may be approved following consultation with customers, the local authority and other key stakeholders to address a specific issue impacting on a neighbourhood. For example, an estate with low turnover for larger, family homes but a high number of customers under-occupying some of those homes, applicants downsizing may be given increased priority for smaller homes, flats or bungalows. All Local Lettings Plans are required to have a detailed Equality Impact Assessment completed to ensure that no applicants are disadvantaged as a result of the Pln.
- (iii) Any **Agency and 'Move On' Referral arrangements**, which are generally where applicants have been residing at a specific scheme whilst receiving care and support services but are now ready to manage their own tenancy,
- (iv) **Management lets and Decants**, for urgent internal transfers for existing Riverside customers who need to move due to an emergency situation or as a result of a regeneration scheme or stock rationalisation.
- (v) Where we have a proportion of homes that are available to be allocated outside of the above, we may advertise these homes as **Direct Lets** on The Riverside Group website and/or another property marketing portal, enabling applicants with housing needs but who are not aware that they are eligible for social housing homes to be considered.

All applicants, regardless of the allocation route, will be taken through our Pre-tenancy Application process and checks, which include an affordability assessment. Where appropriate, customers may be referred to our additional Money Advice and Affordable Warmth support service who can provide specialist advice.

4.2 Customer Eligibility

Homes are allocated in accordance with our Identity, Eligibility and Immigration Procedure, as required under the Immigration Act 2014.

We also have a Suspensions Procedure which sets out the categories of applicant who we may apply a suspension to. Every applicant will be dealt with individually and fairly, taking into account their specific set of circumstances.

As detailed above, homes let through local authority nominations will be subject to the local authority's own Allocations and Letting Scheme Policy, however, where their Policy is silent

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------



or defers to The Riverside Group's own Policy, the following types of applicants will not usually be offered a social housing tenancy by The Riverside Group unless there are additional considerations or mitigating factors:

- (i) **Homeowners:** Applicants who are homeowners, encompassing anyone who has a mortgage for the whole or part of their home, and
- (ii) **Sufficient Financial Resources to meet own housing needs at market rates:** Applicants with combined financial resources consistent with the UK Government's upper limit for savings set out in the common rules of the DWP Benefit and Pension Rates.

Additional considerations or mitigating factors would include:

- a. Applicants needing to move due to urgent health and welfare reasons which make their current home unsuitable, for example, where adaptations or significant repairs are needed, but the household have insufficient equity in the property or other means to be able to afford to complete the work.
- b. Where there is a severe and imminent risk to the household's safety from continuing to occupy their current home.

4.3 Property Type Eligibility and Bedroom Standards

In order to make the best use of our homes, we will always seek to maximise the occupancy of a property according to the property size eligibility criteria that are used to assess benefit eligibility for assistance with housing costs. Under these criteria, a separate bedroom would be required for;

- a. a couple (aged 16 or over) who live together as partners,
- b. a single adult aged 21 and over,
- c. two children under 10 who are part of the same family,
- d. two children of the same sex under 21 who are part of the same family,
- e. any remaining children who cannot be paired according to the rules above or a foster child, where a separate bedroom is a requirement of the fostering authority.

An additional bedroom may also be considered where there is supporting evidence that it is needed, for example, due to a long-term health or medical condition.

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------



5. Further Information & Support

Linked Strategies, Policies, and Procedures Strategies

Strategies	Policies	Procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Allocations Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy Policy • Choice-Based Lettings Scheme Policies for local housing authority schemes • Any Local Lettings Policies in operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible Tenancies • Housing Under 18s • Identity, Eligibility & Immigration • Let a Property • Management Let • Move On • Rehousing Employees, Board Members & Close Connections • Right to Review • Suspensions • Voids End to End

6. Appeals and Complaints

As detailed in the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, customers are invited to hold us to account for the decisions we make that impact upon them under this Policy.

If a customer wishes to appeal a decision made under this Policy, this should be received and heard under our Right to Review Procedure. Appeals will be heard by a Riverside manager who has not had any previous involvement in, and will be more senior than the colleague making, the original decision.

If a customer wishes to complain about the service they have received under this Policy, this should be handled through our Complaint Handling Procedure, which is governed by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of Practice.

These associated procedures are available on our website at <https://www.riverside.org.uk/you-your-home/customer-feedback/> or <https://www.riverside.org.uk/about-us/our-policies/> and are also available by contacting our Customer Service Centre.

7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Riverside is committed to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. We strive to be fair in our dealings with all people, communities and organisations, taking into account the diverse nature of their culture and background and actively promoting inclusion. This policy aligns with Riverside's [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#) and has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------



8. Roles and Responsibilities

<p>Director of Homes & Communities and Director of Operations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the relevant service area, supported by the Head of Lettings and Assistant Directors of Operations
<p>Head of Lettings and Assistant Directors of Operations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for the delivery of the content of the policy, ensuring properties are let in line with regulatory requirements and that any training for operational colleagues is designed and delivered
<p>Housing Services Teams and C&S Operational colleagues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for carrying out viewings and sign ups with new customers • Responsible for providing face to face advice and support to customers
<p>Lettings Officers and C&S Operational colleagues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for providing specialist lettings advice and support to customers by telephone • Responsible for advertising available homes • Responsible for undertaking pre-tenancy applications and preparing sign up packs for new customers
<p>Customer Service Advisers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for providing first point of contact advice and support to customers by telephone

9. Risk

Customer Experience

As we improve the customer experience, we are identifying and addressing exceptions to our customer standards which have developed over many years. We accept this risk as part of our current business model as we are seeking to address these issues as a priority. Over time our tolerance of such will diminish and we will revise the score accordingly.

The short term consequence of making major improvements may be a temporary reduction in customer service and as a result customer satisfaction. We will only accept such reductions where there is a clear articulation of the potential impact and an agreed action plan to return to acceptable levels. We also accept that, as such change may not be welcomed by all of our staff, there is a risk of industrial action and adverse media comment.

We will innovate in the way we deliver customer service including through digitisation but not without careful consideration of risk.

We have a full suite of customer experience KPIs which are scrutinised by Executive Directors, Group Board and our Customer Experience and Care & Support Committees. Targets are set as informed by Customer Experience and Care & Support Committees.

Empty Homes Management

We will not tolerate any risks which threaten the delivery of our empty homes targets.

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

Policy Approval Date:	Mar-24	Date of next review:	Jan-27
-----------------------	--------	----------------------	--------

