

# LETTINGS POLICY

## Customer Service: English Regions

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### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. Riverside is 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.
- 1.2. We aim 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.
- 1.3. We have 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. We will 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 Forward Together – Care & Support 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.

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## 2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to lettings of General Needs homes in England (Intermediate, Social and Affordable Rent), and Retirement Living homes. It does not apply to homes in Scotland, Supported Housing Schemes and Care Services, Market Rent and Shared Ownership homes, or garages.
- 2.2. This policy does not apply to our London Region (formerly One Housing) where a different policy is in use pending full integration (expected late 2025).

## 3. Principles

- 3.1. We will:
  - Treat all customers with fairness and respect.
  - We will take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes, using data to understand the diverse needs of our customers and assess our service.
  - Our communications and information will be clear, accessible, relevant and appropriate to the needs of our customers.
  - We will support customers to use our service, ensuring that our service is accessible to all, including enabling our customers to be supported by an advocate or representative.
  - When reviewing and updating this policy, we will engage with customers, giving them a meaningful opportunity to influence our service. We will tailor these opportunities to meet the needs of the customers wishing to participate.
  - We will keep customers up to date on progress, next steps and outcomes on services that affect them.
  - Our decision-making criteria will be clear and set out in the Roles and Responsibilities section below.
  - We will provide customers with information about how we are performing against this policy and the actions we are taking to improve performance if required. Details of how we will do this will be set out in the associated procedure(s).
  - If we fail to meet any of these principles in a material way, we will self-refer to the Regulator of Social Housing and put improvement actions in place to minimise recurrence.
- 3.2. 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.
  - Sustainability of neighbourhoods.
  - To enable customers to exercise choice and preferences where possible.

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- 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.

## Operation

3.3. 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:

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

3.1.2. 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.

3.1.3. 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

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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 Plan.

3.1.4. 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.

3.1.5. **Management lets** and **Decants**, for urgent internal transfers for existing customers who need to move due to an emergency situation or as a result of a regeneration scheme or stock rationalization.

3.1.6. 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 our 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.

3.4. 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.

### Customer Eligibility

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

3.6. 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.

3.7. 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 or defers to our own Policy, the following types of applicants will not usually be offered a social housing tenancy by us unless there are additional considerations or mitigating factors:

- **Homeowners:** Applicants who are homeowners, encompassing anyone who has a mortgage for the whole or part of their home.
- **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.

3.8. Additional considerations or mitigating factors would include:

- 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.
- Where there is a severe and imminent risk to the household’s safety from continuing to occupy their current home.

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### Property Type Eligibility and Bedroom Standards

- 3.9. 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 couple (aged 16 or over) who live together as partners,
  - a single adult aged 21 and over,
  - two children under 10 who are part of the same family,
  - two children of the same sex under 21 who are part of the same family,
  - 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.
- 3.10. 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.

## 4. Further Information & Support

- 4.1. Customers and other stakeholders can access our Policies through the Riverside website at [Our policies - Riverside](#) and [Our policies - Riverside Scotland](#). Internally, Policies are available on the Policy Management System.
- 4.2. This Policy conforms to our Customer Care Policy. We aim to deliver high quality customer service across all business streams, operating areas, and subsidiaries, and within all activities whilst meeting all legal and regulatory requirements. This involves putting the customer first, respecting their rights, needs and views.
- 4.3. We aim to identify and support customers who, because of a protected characteristic, vulnerability or diverse need require extra support or an adjustment to access our services, in line with our organisational values of 'We Care', 'We are Inclusive' and 'We are Trusted'.
- 4.4. This Policy has been written in collaboration with our customers through our approved customer panels. Reviews will be undertaken every three years, or as required when new legislation or regulatory requirements are published, and customers will be given the opportunity to influence the way we work within the requirements set out in the relevant housing law and regulations described above, and in conjunction with our Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy and Policy.
- 4.5. Here we share a passion and a vision to make a difference for our customers by transforming lives and revitalising neighbourhoods. To achieve our vision, we consistently look for ways of improving the way we work, and how we deliver our services so we can always put our customers first. Our Riverside Way represents who we are, what we stand for and guides how we work, treat our customers, and each other.
- 4.6. Data Protection and Privacy are at the heart of the services we offer and are the foundations of our relationships with our customers, colleagues, partners and

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stakeholders. Personal data is valuable, and we must always act fairly, ethically and with integrity when dealing with it. The fair and lawful handling and protection of personal data is critical to developing trust and confidence and building and sustaining long term relationships with those we provide homes to, and care for. We are dedicated to safeguarding the personal data under our care and to the continual development of a Privacy and Data Protection framework that is effective, fit for purpose and demonstrates an understanding of, and appreciation for Data Protection and the opportunities it brings. We are committed to the continuous cycle of improvement and enhancement of our compliance and governance framework.

4.7. We are looking into how we can make our Procedures more access to Customers and other stakeholders, in the meantime requests for information can be made through the CSC (processed as a STAIRS request). Internally, associated Procedures are available on the Processes and Procedures Hub at Riverside Processes.

4.8. Linked Strategies, Policies and Procedures:

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

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## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

### Directors (Homes & Communities, C&S Operations)

- Responsible for the day to day operational management of the relevant service area, supported by Heads of Service

### Heads of Service (Housing Management Services, C&S Operations)

- 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

### Housing Services Team and C&S Operational Colleagues

- Responsible for carrying out viewings and sign ups with new customers
- Responsible for providing face to face advice and support to customers

### Lettings Officers and C&S Operational Colleagues

- Responsible for providing specialist lettings advice and support to customers by telephone, MyRiverside App and email
- Responsible for advertising available homes
- Responsible for undertaking pre-tenancy applications and preparing sign up packs for new customers

### Customer Service Advisors

- Responsible for providing first point of contact advice and support to customers by telephone and web-chat

## 6. Risks

### Customer Experience

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. 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 colleagues, there is a risk of industrial action and adverse media comment.
- 6.3. We will innovate in the way we deliver customer service including through digitisation but not without careful consideration of risk.
- 6.4. We have a full suite of customer experience KPIs which are scrutinised by Executive Directors, Group Board and our Customer Experience and Care & Support

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Committees. Targets are set as informed by Customer Experience and Care & Support Committees.

### Empty Homes Management

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

## 7. Appeals & Complaints

7.1. 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.

7.2. If a customer wishes to appeal a decision made under this Policy, this should be received and heard under our Tenancy Policy and Right to Review Procedure.

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

7.4. These associated Policies and Procedures are available on our website at:

- England: <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.

## 8. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

8.1. We are 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 our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment

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