



ALLOCATION & LETTINGS POLICY



Allocation and Lettings
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1.0	Claire Stone - EDCEX	22/01/2020	22/01/2021	Change of template, removal of Accent Mutual Exchange system	Rebecca Grant
1.1	Claire Stone - EDCEX	30/04/2020	22/01/2021	Revised to reflect new structure and job titles	Lisa Watson
1.2	Claire Stone - EDCEX	10/11/2020	22/01/2021	Addition of Rent on Time in s3.	James Place
1.3	CEC 15/01/2021	07/01/2021	07/01/2022	Annual review	Shaun Finegan
1.4	Claire Stone - EDCEX	30/09/2021	07/01/2022	Minor amendment	Shaun Finegan
2.0	Customer Experience Committee 01/02/2022	07/01/2022	07/01/2023	Change of template, removal of Accent Mutual Exchange system. Inclusion of Downsizing and Mutual Exchange policy	Gavin Houghton
2.1	CEC 26/04/2022	25/04/2022	30/09/2023	Expansion of Mutual Exchange, Downsizing and Transfer explanation	Gavin Houghton
3.0	CEC 22/01/2024	20/10/2023	20/10/2024	Updated to reflect approach of new national lettings service	Alison Crowhurst

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to set out our approach to how we allocate and let our homes.

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2. Introduction

We are a housing association that works to improve people's lives. We will achieve our mission by providing safe, secure, quality, and affordable homes.

We are committed to the letting of properties in a fair and transparent way. We have a duty to assist Local Authorities in the fulfillment of their legislative requirements and undertake to support our existing residents who are in housing need under the governance of this policy.

This policy covers allocations to general needs housing, independent living for older people, and some supported housing where allocation is not made via a professional's assessment panel.

This policy does not cover; the transfer of tenancies made by any appropriate Court Order; lettings made in specifically designated temporary accommodation, the decanting of existing residents, or residents mutually exchanging their tenancies.

3. Scope

The scope of this policy is to outline how we will:

- Allocate rental properties to those in greatest housing need.
- Let our homes in a fair and equitable way, which is not discriminatory to any person or group.
- Let our homes in an efficient and timely manner.
- Make the best use of our homes and build balanced and sustainable communities.
- Work with customers and partner local authorities to minimise potential financial hardship from under occupation due to the 'bedroom tax' and other welfare benefit changes.
- Offer continuing support to customers to help them manage their home.
- Contribute to the local authorities' strategic housing function and comply with S106 agreements.

We will use this policy to ensure consistency in our approach to any decision making or determination regarding an allocation. We will ensure that this is compliant with all relevant government legislation and statutory guidance.

4. References

This policy complies with the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Tenancy Standard, Home Standard and Affordable Rent Framework.

The key pieces of legislation and guidance that currently govern registered providers and internal Accent Housing policies are:

- Housing Acts 1985, 1988 and 1996
- Local Government Act 2000
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Housing Act 2004

- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Immigration Status Act 2016
- RSH's Tenancy Standard and Home Standard
- RSH's Affordable Homes Programme Framework 2021-2026
- Equality Act 2010
- Accent Downsizing procedure
- Accent Mutual Exchange procedure
- Accent Transfer Procedure
- Accent Tenancy Policy

We have a duty under the Housing Act 1996 to co-operate with local authorities, so far as it is reasonable, to offer accommodation to people in priority need under Local Authority letting schemes.

5. Definitions

Choice Based Lettings

The method used to allocate homes by advertising available properties to eligible applicants, and then shortlisting those interested by their relative priority. This gives applicants' choice about the type of property and area where they want to live.

Nominations Agreement

Accent Housing Ltd maintains a nominations agreement in the majority of Local Authority areas of operation. The agreement sets out the minimum percentage of available vacancies that the authority would be able to nominate applicants from its own housing register to, and how they will do this. These agreements require at least 75% of available homes in the South and East sub-regions, and typically 50% of available homes in the North East and North West sub-regions to be offered to the relevant Local Authorities for such nominations. In some sites / schemes (such as new build schemes) 100% nominations apply.

'Difficult to Let' unit of accommodation

On occasion a property may be refused by more than 3 consecutive nominees, or there may be no suitable applicants currently matched to the property profile. Properties in certain low demand locations or estates with high turnover may also be classified as such. If this is the case external advertising to private or other social agencies may be considered. There may also be an opportunity to look at whether the property meets the requirements for possible disposal.

Direct Applicants

Direct applicants will only be sought once nomination agreement arrangements have been satisfied, any shortlist of nominations have been exhausted and the Local Authority have confirmed they are unable to provide any further suitable nominations.

Downsizing

Downsizing is the process by which a customer moves from a larger, underoccupied property to a smaller one. We can provide both financial and practical support to assist customer downsizing. We will promote downsizing to encourage our customers to sustain their homes and communities.

6. Key Points

Eligibility

- In all cases where a nomination is provided by a Local Authority all appropriate checks to ensure that the nominated household has the Right to Rent in the UK will be carried out by that authority. Where any applicants apply directly to Accent Housing Ltd, we will ensure that this legal standard is met.
- Where local authority partners have set thresholds for earned applicant income, savings and/or asset value, Accent Housing Ltd will adopt these for transferring households. Households exceeding these thresholds will be deemed to have sufficient resources to meet their own housing needs. Where no limits are set, we will apply a threshold of £50,000 for household income. In the North East and North West a threshold of £16,000 will apply for savings or asset value, in the South and East this will be £30,000. Welfare benefits are excluded from income thresholds. Applicants above these limits will only be accepted with the approval of the Director of Housing Services. Non-disclosure of savings, assets or income later identified will be classified as fraudulent and could result in legal action to recover any property let under such pretenses.
- Owner occupiers are not usually eligible to apply but may be considered for Independent Living schemes for older people where there is an evidenced need and they have insufficient equity in their home for any alternative options, as per the asset value thresholds stated.
- Any applicant who has threatened an Accent Housing Ltd colleague or representatives will not be eligible, unless authorised by the Director of Housing Services.
- Any applicant who has paid money to illegally obtain a tenancy, or otherwise obtained a tenancy by deception; or any applicant who has committed a breach of tenancy that would have entitled the landlord to possession under a Ground listed in schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1988 will not be eligible.

Bedroom Need Matrix

Accent Housing Ltd has adopted the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) guidelines for bedroom entitlement and Housing Benefit / Housing element of Universal Credit eligibility.

Number of bedrooms	Overall no. of occupants	Maximum occupancy
0	1	Single Adult
1	1-2	Single / Couple*
2	2-4	Single/Couple plus 2 children of same sex up to age of 16, OR 2 children of different sex up to age of 10 OR A non-residential carer, providing overnight care for a resident adult Couple with agreed medical need for separate bedrooms
3	3-6	Any additional children subject to the same sharing criteria above Any other single adult member of household aged 16 plus
4	4-8	
5	6 plus	

*A single adult within the household (who is not the applicant) would only be entitled to a separate room if there is no other person they can share with. However, an adult would not be expected to share with their own child.

Verification

Accent Housing Ltd will always request and retain a copy of photographic ID for all incoming residents at the point at which they are made an offer of accommodation. We will also take a photo of the resident. This is to guard against future tenancy fraud and to ensure that the applicants' details match those provided by the nominating authority. For direct applicants we will carry out Right to Rent checks in accordance with Home Office guidance. We may also carry out additional checks including, but not limited to,

- Reference checks with current or previous landlord
- Criminal records background check / national fraud initiative data sharing
- Credit check and / or Income assessment including benefit entitlement

Multiple and provisional offers

Accent Housing Ltd will make provisional offers to prospective customers, subject to an evaluation process prior to the signing of a tenancy. This evaluation may include a home visit or assessment of an applicant's needs, any other background checks which are required, and the viewing of the property.

Accent Housing Ltd may also issue multiple offer letters to prospective customers and arrange an open viewing of an available property. Each letter will indicate the ranking in numerical order of the applicant included in the multiple offer.

Rent on time

We will work with our customers at the beginning of their moving in experience to gain an understanding of their income and circumstances. This information will be used to determine the most appropriate initial rent payment on the date of their welcome meeting in accordance with the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement. Our aim is to ensure that customers have the best chance of keeping a clear rent account and preventing future debt. We follow the principle of 'rent on time'. Full details and a breakdown of initial payment and future payments will be discussed and agreed during the application process.

Withdrawal of offers

Accent Housing Ltd reserves the right to withdraw a provisional offer of accommodation at any stage during the re-let process if there are any concerns about the prospective customer's ability to successfully maintain a tenancy, or their requirements are found to be different to those indicated by their application.

Refusal of offers

If an applicant is nominated by a Local Authority and wishes to refuse an offer of accommodation, we will advise the applicant to seek immediate advice from that Local Authority as to the consequences this may have for any future housing assistance. If the Local Authority wishes to enforce the offer, Accent Housing Ltd will allow no more than 48 hours for the applicant to reconsider.

Our decision and Rights of Appeal

We will base our allocation decision on eligibility, affordability, sustainability and housing need.

All applicants have the right to appeal against any allocation decision taken by Accent Housing Ltd. This may include where Accent Housing Ltd has decided an application is ineligible, that the applicant does not qualify for accommodation, or an offer of accommodation is withdrawn. The applicant must express this in writing within 21 days of the decision having been made. If the applicant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal, they should seek independent advice. They should only follow the Accent Housing Ltd complaints process if they can demonstrate that there has been a failing of the organisation to follow this policy.

Transfers

- Transfers are only granted in exceptional circumstances and will need to be approved by the Allocations and Lettings Manager, Head of Housing Services and Director of Housing Services.
- Customers who request to be transferred to another Accent Housing property must be able to demonstrate the urgency of the need to be moved and why a mutual exchange may not be a suitable option for them.
- Current customers of Accent Housing Ltd are required to have lived at their current property for a minimum of 12 months before they can apply for a transfer. They must also have successfully completed any starter or introductory period of their tenancy.
- Customers must also have maintained their current home to an acceptable standard, as identified by a pre-transfer inspection. Any debt for rechargeable works must be cleared.

7. Wider Initiatives

Local Lettings Policies and Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Accent Housing Ltd may operate local lettings policies on some estates to demonstrate our commitment to creating and maintaining sustainable homes and local communities. Local lettings policies will be introduced for new build schemes where we are letting a high number of properties at one time. Where these are introduced the need for such will be clearly evidenced with data collected internally and externally and agreed in conjunction with the Local Authority. Any additional criteria or eligibility requirements will be clearly indicated to all prospective applicants. Local lettings policies will need to be agreed by the Customer Experience Committee.

S106: A planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which may apply additional restrictions on who can rent a property.

If there are any restrictions on who we can offer a property to this will be indicated on the property advert details. We hold a register of this information for internal guidance.

'High Risk' allocations

Accent Housing Ltd will expect any nominating Local Authority to share all relevant recent medical or risk-related paperwork in accordance with data sharing protocols, for the safeguarding of our colleagues and other residents. We reserve the right to refuse to rehouse high-risk potential nominees as well as those where relevant professionals do not provide the relevant risk information. . In some cases, we may refuse a high-risk applicant for a particular property due to locally specific circumstances but consider them for housing elsewhere. We may seek to interview the potential nominee prior to any offer being made to ensure they are aware that

commitment to engaging with support services is integral to their maintaining a tenancy. We will work in partnership with Probation and the Police in relation to rehousing applicants subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

Mutual Exchange

Accent Housing Ltd residents have the right to 'swap' or exchange tenancies either with other Accent Housing Ltd residents, or with residents of other social housing providers. We will retain membership of an internet based mutual exchange platform, to facilitate mutual exchanges for our customers. For most customers this is the most likely way that they will be able to move.

8. Allocations to Colleagues / Relatives / Contractors

All applicants are asked to declare any interest they hold in Accent Housing Ltd. We may provide accommodation to its board members, employees, former employees and their close relatives provided that;

- They are in housing need and have been assessed by their local authority and meet the allocation criteria
- They receive exactly the same consideration as any other applicant
- They have no involvement or influence over the allocation decision

Accent Housing Ltd will not consider applications from former employees if they have a conviction or pending legal action for alleged criminal activity related in any way to their employment with Accent Housing Ltd, or to Accent Housing Ltd. Close scrutiny will apply to all potential allocations to employees and contractors or their close relatives and will require approval by the Executive team and the Board of Directors.

9. Exclusions

Existing Accent residents

In exceptional circumstances, it will be agreed for an existing customer to transfer. If an existing Accent resident is looking for a new home we will carry out a property inspection and a review of how their current tenancy is being managed. It may be deemed appropriate to reject/postpone a request for a new home where there has been any breaches in tenancy.

Vulnerable adult

If we receive an application from a vulnerable adult and there is an inadequate support package in place, we may decide that it is not in the best interests of the customer to be rehoused at this time.

Sex offenders

Applications from ex sex offenders will be considered but only where we have confirmation from the Local Authority and probation services that any risks have been identified and adequate monitoring arrangements are in place.

Adapted properties

Some of our properties have been specifically adapted for people with disability needs and as such we would prioritise these homes to those customers with these needs.

10. Equality and Diversity

We treat all customers fairly, and with respect, and will not discriminate against any person on the grounds of disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion or belief, age, sex, sexual orientation, or marriage and civil partnerships.

Accent Housing Ltd monitors the protected characteristics of applicants to ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently.

This policy has undergone an equality analysis to ensure that no applicant is disadvantaged as a result.

Find out more here: <https://www.accentgroup.org/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/>