



ALLOCATION & LETTINGS POLICY



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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
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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

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

Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Scope.....	4
3. References	4
4. Our Approach	5
5. Our Homes.....	6
6. Restrictions.....	7
7. Exclusions.....	7
8. Rejections	8
9. Refusals	9
10. Unsuccessful applications	9
11. Variations.....	9

1. 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.

Our ambition is to be recognised as a market leader for the quality of our homes and the effectiveness of our services

We are a people business and to improve lives we offer a range of homes and services that enable people to realise their aspirations, which support them through their personal journeys.

2. Scope

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

- Fulfil our duty to work with local authorities to offer accommodation to those people in 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.

3. 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 are:

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1988
- Housing Act 1996
- Local Government Act 2000
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Housing Act 2004
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Immigration Status Act 2014
- RSH's Tenancy Standard and Home Standard
- RSH's Affordable Homes Programme Framework 2015-18 Guidance
- Equality Act 2010
- Accent Downsizing procedure
- Accent Mutual Exchange procedure

- Accent Transfer Procedure

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

4. Our Approach

Our people

We lead and inspire our colleagues to change people's lives and we are proactive in our approach to allocating our homes. We ensure our decisions are customer driven and we will support and advise our vulnerable customers who may need extra help to sustain their tenancies.

We welcome applications from a wide range of customers and our teams will do their very best to help anyone who is looking for a new home, even if this means we need to refer people to other housing providers.

Diversity and Inclusion is part of the fabric of our organisation, and therefore we will do our very best to ensure that we can meet our customers diverse needs. If you have specific needs, please do let us know and we will do our best to accommodate. Find out more here: <https://www.accentgroup.org/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Our partners

We will work with other agencies to get the best outcomes for our customers and will be transparent about our decisions.

We are committed to working with our local authority partners to help them meet their duty to assist people in housing need. In areas where social housing is in short supply, we may allocate a higher proportion of our properties in partnership with the local authority.

Our decision

We will base our allocation decisions on eligibility, affordability, sustainability and housing need. Customer care is embedded in our culture and we will make sensible and conscientious lets that focus on the right home for the right person at the right time of their journey.

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. 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 your initial payment and future payments will be discussed and agreed with you during the application process.

5. Our Homes

Direct

We will advertise a high proportion of our vacant homes on the Accent Website. Customers can apply directly to register their interest. We will not hold waiting lists, there will be no preference given based on 'time waiting'.

Local Authority nominations

Where it is of mutual benefit we will hold agreements with local authorities to offer a percentage of our homes to customers who are referred to us directly from the LA.

Choice Based Lettings

Where it is of mutual benefit, we will opt in to local authority choice based lettings schemes. We will offer advice to customers on how they access these services. An agreed percentage of our properties may be allocated through choice based lettings agreements.

Urgent transfer

Some of our customers find themselves in dangerous or unsafe circumstances and it can be deemed necessary to consider an urgent move to a more suitable property or environment. We will work with our customers to support them and aid a positive move.

Mutual Exchange

Mutual Exchange is a term used to describe two or more households who have agreed to swap homes. We have partnered with House Exchange who offer an online service that allows our customers to see other households who would be interested in swapping homes. This can be with other social landlords or local authorities.

We will promote mutual exchanges to encourage tenant mobility, make best use of housing stock so that income is maximised and to support sustainable communities and tenancies where people choose to live and want to stay.

Written consent is required from each landlord and is subject to certain criteria. Further information can be found in our Mutual Exchange Procedure.

Internal transfer

We will actively promote and encourage transfers. We will support our existing customers to move home in line with Accents retention strategy and in doing so will make best use of our housing stock. We will only consider an application for a transfer from a starter tenant in exceptional circumstances.

Transfers are subject to several checks such as, clear rent account, local lettings policy, age restrictions and others. Further information can be found in our Transfer procedure.

Downsizing

Downsizing enables customer to move from a larger property to a smaller one. Downsizing has benefits for our customers, some examples include being affected by the Bedroom Tax, Upkeep and maintenance or cost of utilities. We can provide both financial and practical support to assist customer downsizing. We will promote downsizing to encourage our customer to sustain their homes and communities.

6. Restrictions

Young persons

In exceptional circumstances, we may offer a tenancy to a young person aged 16 or 17. In these cases, we will use an equitable tenancy. Once the resident reaches the age of 18, we may grant them a starter tenancy.

Criminal convictions

Applicants who have criminal convictions or are due to be released from prison can apply and will be assessed using the same criteria as those who do not. It may be necessary that further checks with a relevant body are required e.g. probation/prison service. We will assess those with criminal convictions on a case by case basis.

Accent residents

Accent residents that have lived with us for 12 months or less but are considering moving should discuss their situation with their Customer Partner. We do not encourage property transfers during the first year of someone's tenancy, however if a move would help prevent health and well-being issues or financial crisis we have the discretion to make a positive transfer.

Staff members

Where applications are received from staff members, board members or relatives of an Accent employee we will ask a peer team to assess and verify the property offer and assess the application for housing.

7. Exclusions

Existing Accent residents

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 that any risks have been identified and adequate monitoring arrangements are in place.

Interest in a second home

We would not usually offer a new home to anyone who already has a tenancy elsewhere and intends to maintain his or her interest in the other property.

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. We may therefore exclude you from these properties if you do not meet the necessary criteria.

Eligibility – Right to live in the UK

There is a legal obligation for us to make sure that we house people who have the adequate immigration status and we will ask for identification to verify this.

Full details can be found by following this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-rent-document-checks-a-user-guide>

We will not house any customers who are legally not eligible for social housing, such as those subject to immigration control.

8. Rejections

We reserve the right to reject your application for housing, this may occur under the following circumstances:

- Unsatisfactory references
- Unsuitable circumstances
- Providing false or misleading information
- Convicted of a 'serious offence' that has not been spent, and that may pose a threat/risk to Accent, the residents of Accent or the community.
- Failure to provide the correct or sufficient documentation

All rejected customers will have the right to appeal a rejection decision within 14 days. We will advise customers of their right to appeal if their application is rejected.

9. Refusals

A refusal is defined as: 'A customer has decided not to accept a property they have been offered. We categorise refusals as either reasonable or unreasonable (full details available on request).

We will consider removing your ability to apply for a new home if it is deemed that you are making repeated unreasonable refusals.

10. Unsuccessful applications

Customers are informed when they bid for a property, if they do not hear from Accent within 2 weeks, then their application has been unsuccessful.

An unsuccessful application would be due to the property being accepted by another applicant who has greater housing needs.

11. Variations

Local Lettings plans

Local lettings plans aim to help create balanced and sustainable communities. This may apply to both new and existing communities and may take priority over an Allocation and Lettings Policy.

If there any local lettings plans that restrict the type of customer that we can consider for a property this will be indicated on the property advert details.

Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

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.

Joint allocations policies

In some areas we may be part of a Joint Allocation Policy with a local authority and/or other housing associations. This may apply to both new and existing homes. If this is the case, then we will bear this in mind in considering the Allocation and Lettings Policy.