



Allocation Policy

Policy owner/author:	Housing Manager
Approved by:	
Date approved:	
Next review date:	

1. Policy Statement

Stoke on Trent Housing Society's core business is to provide high-quality housing for rent and excellent housing services. We also aim to create and sustain neighbourhoods where people want to live. We want to ensure everyone has fair and open access to our homes and can easily understand the application process.

We aim to comply with all relevant housing legislation and to apply best practice. We are committed to letting our homes in a way that is fair to everyone, regardless of factors such as disability, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion or family circumstances. We will work with the Local Authority and other social landlords to identify and meet housing need in the Stoke on Trent area and to maximise and simplify access routes into our housing.

This policy sets out the rules and process we will use to let our empty homes, including how we will prioritise applicants.

2. Access to a Stoke on Trent Society home

There are 2 routes to access a Stoke on Trent Housing Society home:

Route 1:

Choice Based Lettings Scheme – available properties will be advertised via www.homehunt.co.uk. Customers, including tenants wanting to transfer, can “bid” on properties advertised on this website and providing they meet the criteria will be considered based on eligibility and a simple assessment.

Route 2:

Local Authority nominations – a percentage of Stoke on Trent Housing Society’s available properties are let to households selected by Stoke on Trent City Council. In order to be considered for these vacancies customers will need to apply directly to Stoke on Trent City Council and will be assessed and selected according to their priority system (the Society may reject a nomination if the nominee does not meet any agreed local lettings plan or comply with the Society’s Allocation policy).

3. Local Lettings Plans

Some of our empty properties will be subject to a local lettings plan when we let them.

A local lettings plan allows Stoke on Trent Housing Society to be more flexible in allocating homes to meet specific local issues. For example, a local lettings plan might include:

- Criteria to give a mix of household sizes or ages to give a balanced community
- Criteria that aims to reduce the likelihood of anti-social behaviour in areas that have high levels of or are at risk of anti-social behaviour
- To help new residents blend in smoothly to an existing and already established community

Where a local lettings plan is developed, it will be flexible and non-discriminatory. This may require some applicants to be considered before others irrespective of their application date or housing need.

Empty properties that fall within an agreed local lettings plan will be clearly displayed on our adverts.

4. First come first served

We take a flexible approach to letting less popular properties. Where a property has previously been advertised and we have not been able to allocate it, it may be re-advertised on a “first come first served” basis.

‘First Come First Served’ properties will be advertised on Stoke on Trent Housing Society’s website, via www.homehunt.co.uk and via local press/social media/property rental websites. These properties will be made available to the first applicant to express an interest in the property, provided they are eligible for housing and their household meets the advertised property criteria. Under-occupation will be allowed subject to an affordability assessment.

5. Eligibility criteria

Migrants - the law requires us 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.

Age - customers applying direct to us will need to be 18 or over

Local Connection - customers will not need to have a local connection to Stoke on Trent to apply for particular properties 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

References - we will gather references from current or previous landlords

Income - customers will be required to provide up to date income details prior to any offers being made to make sure that they can afford to pay the rent and live in the property. 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).

Property type/size entitlement- to make sure that tenancies are as secure and affordable as possible, it is important that households are not allocated a property larger than they need or can afford. We have used the criteria from the Welfare

Reform Act 2012 to assess the size of property a household needs, however we will 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.

Divorced / separated non- resident parents who want to provide accommodation for children from former relationships to stay overnight will be considered for 2 bedroom properties and this will be subject to affordability assessment.

Pregnant women will be considered for 2 bedroom properties when they produce their MATb1 Form at 26 weeks.

Ground floor and adapted properties will be allocated to the customer who has the greatest need for the specific access/adaptations, and number of bedrooms which the property has. This may require some applicants to be considered before others irrespective of their application date or housing need.

Connection to Stoke on Trent Housing Society – a tenancy may be granted to officer's relatives, members or employees of the Society. The individual will be treated no more favourably than any other customer and any offer of tenancy will be authorised by Stoke on Trent Housing Society's Board.

6. Exclusions

Stoke on Trent Housing Society will exclude or suspend customers from applying for their homes where there is evidence of unacceptable behaviour that is serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant. We will be fair and transparent in our decision making process and demonstrate our reasons for refusal.

Reasons for exclusion:

- Non-payment of rent or housing related debt in respect of current or previous tenancies/licences.
- Where there is evidence of anti-social behaviour or serious unacceptable behaviour, such as deliberate nuisance, violence against people
- Customers who have failed to conduct a current or previous tenancy or licence in a satisfactory manner
- Those considered unable 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

- Persons convicted of certain criminal offences subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Customers who do not meet the affordability assessment and will not be able to pay their rent
- Where customers have provided false information or deliberately withheld information. In the instance that a tenancy has already been granted that tenancy may be terminated and a fine imposed.

Information and evidence required to establish any of the above will be sought via:

- Customer information and public domain information (or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that relevant information may exist)
- Information from Staffordshire Police for the purpose of reducing/preventing crime
- Tenancy references

Stoke on Trent Housing Society operates information exchange protocols with other organisations such as other Housing Associations and the Police. We will only exchange information in accordance with these protocols.

Customers excluded or suspended from the register will be informed of the reason and provided with information on a right of appeal.

7. Transfers

Stoke on Trent Housing tenants in defined housing need, as described in this policy, can apply to move to another property. Residents will be assessed regarding the reasons they are considering a move so that appropriate advice can be given regarding the options available.

Before any transfer will be authorised a property inspection will be completed to ensure that the property is clean and tidy and in a good state of repair. Where there is evidence of unsatisfactory conduct and customers are in breach of their tenancy agreement, no transfer will be authorised and instead tenancy enforcement action may be taken which could lead to eviction.

On occasion there may be a requirement to make an allocation of a specific property to a Stoke on Trent Housing tenant where there is a particular urgency for them to move, usually supported by evidence of serious threat to personal safety or hardship.

These customers will be directly let a property that will not be advertised via Homehunt.

8. Mutual Exchanges

Tenants who wish to swap their home with another tenant from Stoke on Trent Housing Society or from another Registered Social Landlord or Local Authority can apply for a Mutual Exchange. We permit mutual exchanges subject to the following:

- both parties have conducted their tenancies in a satisfactory manner and neither party is in rent arrears and satisfactory rent accounts have been maintained
- the households are reasonably appropriate to the size of houses exchanged. Incoming parties should not overcrowd the accommodation they intend to move to, nor severely under occupy it
- the outgoing tenants leave the properties in a satisfactory decorative condition and without any outstanding repairs that is the tenant’s responsibility
- we are satisfied the exchange is in the interests of community safety

Permission to exchange will not normally be granted in the following circumstances:

- a ‘live’ legal notice has been served on the applicant by the landlord
- in exceptional circumstances where we are advised by the police or other relevant agency that the exchange would not be reasonable or advisable on the grounds of community safety

9. Assessment of application

Applications for our homes will be assessed in accordance with a simple banding scheme:

<p>Band 1</p> <p>Tenants of Stoke on Trent Housing Society with a defined housing need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has health and/or mobility issues where their current accommodation is having a serious adverse effect on their health • is overcrowded in their current accommodation in accordance with our property eligibility criteria • can evidence a need to move on care/support/welfare grounds or where a move would contribute to better use of
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	our housing stock - such applications will be considered on a case by case basis
Band 2 All other applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no specific criteria required

In addition, Stoke on Trent Housing 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 will be given priority within our BAND 1 and BAND 2 categories and subsequent priority is by registration date order within the respective category.

10. Community Contribution

Community contribution applies where the customer is able to demonstrate at least one of the following criteria:-

- currently employed for a minimum of 16 hours a week and has been regularly employed for the past three months or more
- volunteers for 6 or more hours a week for a recognised organisation and has done so for at least 6 months*
- undertaking work preparation training on a regular basis (e.g. ongoing attendance at Job Clubs, Employment focused workshops and training)

*Recognised organisations include for example, registered charities or other community and voluntary organisations.

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

11. Advertising and bidding

Available homes will be advertised at www.homehunt.co.uk and customers will need to register here in order to bid on properties. There is no limit to the number of properties customers are able to bid on however bids can only be considered where customers have proceeded to complete the relevant series of questions that appear on Homehunt once they have bid for one of our properties.

Adverts will appear at www.homehunt.co.uk as and when we become aware of a vacancy and we will include as much property information as possible. This will include property address and photograph, property type, size, amenities, rent and service charge payable. Should any specific lettings criteria be applicable, such as a local lettings plan, then we will also include this in the property advert.

Where a customer repeatedly places bids on properties and then proceeds to refuse any offers made, they will be contacted to discuss their application and may be suspended from making further bids if their reasons for refusal are not reasonable.

12. Offers

The customer with the highest assessment criteria and earliest registration date will be contacted to discuss a tentative offer of the property. We will make arrangements to visit them in their current home or an office interview will be scheduled. This will give us the opportunity to confirm the details of their application and suitability for the property, verify their right to rent a property, complete an affordability assessment and to discuss and agree the Society Deal - what they can expect from the Society and what the Society expects from them.

Following a successful interview and the provision of any relative documentation we will invite the customer to view the property and a firm offer of tenancy will be made.

13. Appeals

Customers who are unhappy with a decision relating to their application can appeal and must do so in writing within 21 days of notification. This will be dealt with in line with Stoke on Trent Housing Society's Formal Complaints procedure.