

Allocations and Lettings Policy



Date approved	TBC	Date of Next Review	May 2016
Date of Last Review	May 2015	Review Frequency	Annually
Type of document	Policy		
Owner Name Job Title	Jenny Spoor, Group Head of Neighbourhoods		
Approved by	Strategic Management Team – June 2015 Customer Service Committee - 8 Sep 2015		
Linked documents	Tenancy Policy, Tenancy Fraud Policy, Lettings Procedure, Abandonment Procedure, Succession Procedure, Equitable Procedure, Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure, Income Management Policy and Procedure, Recharges and Sundry Debts Procedure, Data Protection Policy and Procedure. The Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 The 1985 Housing Act (as amended) The 1988 Housing Act (as amended) The 1996 Housing Act (as amended) Homelessness Act 2002 Data Protection Act 1988		

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Allocations and Lettings Policy



1. Overview

This policy sets out GreenSquare's approach to the allocation and letting of our social and Affordable rent homes, as well the options available to those who wish to live in a GreenSquare property.

This policy applies to customers of Oxford Citizens Housing Association, Oxbode Housing Association, GreenSquare Community Housing Association, Westlea Housing Association (all trading as GreenSquare) in the following categories: general needs and 55+.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this policy is to outline how GreenSquare will:

- Work with local authority partners in order to help them meet their local 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, in the required lettable standard;
- Make the best use of our stock and build strong, sustainable communities across all our areas of operation;
- Meet the requirements set out by the Government's social housing regulator; currently the Homes and Communities Agency;
- Work with applicants and partner local authorities to minimise potential financial hardship from under occupation due to the 'bedroom tax' and other welfare benefit changes.

3. Legal or regulatory framework

The Homes and Communities Agency state that '*registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They will take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants*'. This will be done by:

- Making the best use of available housing;
- Applicants needs are compatible with the purpose of the housing;

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- Contributing to the local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities;
- Use of clear application, decision making and appeals processes;
- Enabling tenants to gain access to opportunities to exchange with other tenants, via an internet based mutual exchange system.

4. Definitions

CBL	means choice based lettings – the system by which most local authorities make nominations to properties.
S106	means Section 106. A planning obligation under Section 106 of the Planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The common uses of planning obligations are to secure affordable housing, and to specify the type, timing and restrictions of this; and to secure financial contributions to provide infrastructure or affordable housing.
ASB	means anti social behaviour.

5. Our Approach

We are committed to working with our local authority partners to help them meet their duty to assist people in housing need. GreenSquare does not hold its own waiting list and the majority of customers access our homes through the local authority.

We make most of our lettings in accordance with agreements we have with local authorities.

To make the best use of our stock, up to 25% of homes available for re-let may be let by either a 'management move' or a 'direct let' outside of local authority allocations schemes.

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Other circumstances where we may let homes outside of a local authority scheme are where we have local lettings plans. These may be agreed with the appropriate local authority for new schemes, or for existing schemes, to ensure a sustainable community.

For secure and assured tenants, we will promote, offer advice and assist with mutual exchange schemes, currently HomeSwapper. Please see Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure.

6. Access to GreenSquare Homes

Local Authority Nominations

- The majority of our homes will be let via choice based lettings systems operated by the local authority. Agreements are held with each local authority which includes the percentage of lets GreenSquare is able to let outside of their system.
- We will offer advice and assistance to our residents about how to access these systems.
- All new build properties will be let via the local authority. The exception being if they are unable to provide a nomination, in which case please refer to 'direct nomination'.

Mutual Exchanges

- All GreenSquare residents will have access to a internet based mutual exchange system, currently HomeSwapper. This is promoted on our website, and assistance will be given to residents to access this, where required (please refer to mutual exchange policy and procedure).

Management Move/Direct Let

In local authority areas where we do not have to let 100% of our homes via CBL, we may consider requests in the following circumstances:

- To address financial hardship caused by under occupation where the resulting allocation will make best use of our stock;
- Victims of serious harassment;

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- In some circumstances, irresolvable neighbour complaints where there is supporting evidence that we have followed our ASB procedure and all other intervention has failed;
- Unauthorised occupants – this could be for relationship breakdowns, concessionary successor for whom the property is unsuitable;
- To assist with the redevelopment or the change of use of a site;
- In line with our decant policy;
- Where the local authority does not have a statutory duty to provide assistance, requests may also be considered for those suffering victimisation or evidence of health and safety risk.

Direct Nomination

- If the local authority is unable to provide a nomination via their CBL systems, we can let a property via a direct nomination. These do not count towards the % allowance of properties we're able to offer a direct let.
- Applicants for our properties must be a charitable beneficiary through GreenSquare's objectives, and will be subject to the same pre tenancy checks as with those nominations we receive via the local authorities. GreenSquare's Rules of Association objectives state:

A2.1 *...the business of providing housing, accommodation and assistance to help house people and associated facilities and amenities for poor people or the relief of aged, disabled, handicapped (whether physically or mentally) or chronically sick people; and*

A2.2 *Any other charitable object that can be carried out from time to time by an industrial and provident society registered as a social landlord with the Corporation'.*

- There is no standard definition for 'poor'. For the purposes of this Policy, we will apply the definition detailed in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'poverty can be used and defined in various ways. The most common used approach is relative income poverty. Each household's income, adjusted for family size, is compared to median income (the median is the 'middle' income: half of the people have more income and half have less. Those with less than 60 per cent of median income are classified as poor. This 'poverty line' is the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union'.

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- The median income information will be obtained from the Office of National Statistics.
- Advertisement of these properties will be via our website, local newspapers, local community hubs such as shops and doctor surgeries and property websites such as Right Move (not exhaustive).

7. Lettings to Persons Under 18

Applicants under 18 years old are unable to hold a legal interest in land and are therefore not able to hold a tenancy. Applicants under 18 years old can hold an equitable tenancy which should be in the name of a legal guarantor up until the age of 18. For further details see the Equitable Tenancy Procedure.

8. Local Lettings Plans

We will work with local authorities to develop local lettings plans, to help create balanced and sustainable communities. This includes homes which are subject to a S106 as well as those which are not. This may also apply to both new and existing communities.

These may take priority over our Allocation and Lettings Policy, and this will be made clear in the advert for that property. A copy of the local lettings plan will be available for local authorities, perspective and current residents.

9. Exclusions

Rent Arrears

Applicants with former or current arrears owed to GreenSquare will be considered only in exceptional circumstances, such as where the debt is related to an over/under payment of benefit or as a direct result of under occupation charges.

Other applicants with former or current arrears of rent or other housing related debt will not be considered unless the applicant can provide evidence that they are maintaining an agreed repayment plan for each debt, and have been

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doing so for a minimum of 6 consecutive months immediately prior to application; and/or has made a reasonable attempt to repay the majority of the debt.

We may consider exceptions to this if there is evidence that:

- Arrears were accrued as a result of a lack of tenancy support
- Applicants are identified as most at risk of suffering financial hardship if they remain in their current home; and the applicant can demonstrate the affordability of all their existing commitments in addition to all costs relating to the property applied for;
- There is an overriding need, such as a high medical need which has resulted in a home becoming unsafe for a resident or impossible for them to enter or exit safely.

Where residents require smaller accommodation, we will offer advice on how to facilitate this. Some flexibility may be allowed, if there are rent arrears or other debts owed to us. Please see Rent Arrears Policy and Procedure.

ASB

GreenSquare will not house residents who are, or members of their household are, perpetrators of ASB. We may seek evidence of action taken on either the resident or a household member. If this is within the last two years, it's unlikely we will accept the resident. If the ASB was two or more years prior to application and a tenancy has been conducted in a satisfactory way for a minimum of 12 months since the last incident of ASB we will consider for housing.

Home Owners (excludes mobile homes or caravans)

It is unlikely we would house a resident who owns, or has a legal interest in a property. The circumstances in which we would consider this are:

- The property has been, or is about to be repossessed;
- The home owner has fled a property due to domestic violence;
- The property has become unsuitable due to disability, and the home owner is unable to make the required adaptations.

In the case of being nominated for social housing, it is likely the home owner will be taking steps to remove their interest in the property, and we would expect this to be within 12 months from the tenancy start date.

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Residents who have been evicted

We will review each application of a resident, who we, or another registered provider or landlord, has evicted. If the issues which led to this eviction have not been addressed, we may refuse to re-house. If steps, have been taken, for example, engagement with Tenancy Sustainment or other agency, we may choose to consider the application, at a manager's discretion.

Applicants Ineligible for Social Housing

Generally we will not house any residents who are legally not eligible for social housing such as those subject to immigration control.

We reserve the right to let to applicants who ordinarily would not be eligible for social housing. This could be in the following scenarios:

- Where we have hard to let properties and are unable to let via the local authorities CBL system;
- This is a requirement of the S106 or local lettings plan;
- A varied tenure mix is required to create a balanced or sustainable community.

All applicants will meet one or more of our charitable beneficiary criteria.

Hard to let properties will be let on this basis via our website, local community hubs such as doctors surgeries and local shops, the local press or property websites such as Right Move. Our usual pre tenancy checks and tenures would apply, as with a let from the local authority.

10. Immigration Status

We will house applicants who have permanent leave to remain in the UK. The following documents must be seen prior to offering of a property:

- A copy of the passport;
- A copy of the documents sent off with an application to renew leave; and
- Immigration Status document provided with asylum decision; or
- Letter from the Home Office or UKBA confirming eligibility.

If the applicant has limited leave to remain, any offer of accommodation will be regarded by GreenSquare as non-secure and cannot be used as

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permanent accommodation or permanent status for benefit entitlement, for example. In these situations, a temporary, non secure tenancy will be granted (please see Tenancy Policy).

NB The legislation around immigration checks for applicants and household members is set to change in 2015. There is a scheme being piloted in the Midlands, and as yet, we are unclear how this will affect RP's. This section of the Policy will be reviewed when this becomes clear.

11. Monitoring and Reporting

We will monitor and report performance to GreenSquare Board and the Customer Service Committee as required. The Policy will be reviewed on a biennial basis, unless there are significant changes in legislation or local authority policy which affect our ability to let home; or there are found to be any deficiencies or learning points from a complaint, or findings from any independent organisation.

All lettings information will be reported to CORE on an quarterly basis.

12. Equality and Diversity

This policy will be followed in conjunction with GreenSquare's Equality and Diversity Strategy and has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. We will ensure that no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons on account of any diversity strand. We will also ensure our residents have fair access to our tenancy service and provide translation services for community languages when required.

13. Value for Money

As part of our commitment to deliver an economical, efficient and effective service, we will use external benchmarking services and best practice groups to monitor our costs and service outcomes.

We have the skills and expertise to conduct most legal work in-house. We will seek external legal support where this is required.

14. Consultation

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This Policy has been reviewed by the Service Collaborative Management Team and Strategic Management Team.