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|  | HOUSING MANAGEMENT                 | Allocations & Lettings Policy (General) |
|                                                                                  | Providence Row Housing Association | VERSION: 2                              |

## Allocations & Letting Policy (General)

### INTRODUCTION

PRHA objective is to provide good quality affordable and sustainable housing and associated services to people in housing need. Provide existing tenants of the Association with the opportunity to transfer to other accommodation as their needs change. The organisation's offers both supported and general needs housing to those who have been assessed to be accommodated to these property types. Our supported housing section is to give each individual to whom we offer a service the best possible opportunity to gain the skills and confidence necessary to enable them to play an active role within the community and to move on to independent accommodation wherever possible. As a result, we will only offer a tenancy or support service to those who we feel can benefit from a service of this nature.

The vast majority of services we offer are funded by Supporting People. The Supporting People team therefore have a legitimate interest in our lettings and allocations policy. Local authorities exercise this interest in different ways, with Local Authorities negotiating very clear allocations criteria for some services, whilst for others leave the decisions more in the hands of PRHA.

### ALLOCATIONS CRITERIA – GENERAL (SUPPORTED)

**PRHA will consider applications, based on the following criteria, from individuals:**

- In need of the services offered;
- Able to manage any alcohol dependency/drug dependency with support;
- Over 16 years of age; (Guarantor required for 16-17)
- Able to share with people from a variety of backgrounds, ages and cultures;
- Able to manage on a day-to-day basis with background practical support, the level of which may vary according to different needs;
- Able to budget for themselves, with support;
- Able to manage own medication, if prescribed, with support;
- Able to negotiate the physical aspects of the building (with necessary adaptations made by the organisation where possible) and manage simple household tasks;
- Able to look after themselves.

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**Applicants will, in general, be expected to meet all the above criteria.**

Allocation decisions will also take into account the following:

- Balance of needs in the project where appropriate;
- Risk factors, such as incidents of violence or arson.

### **ALLOCATIONS CRITERIA – SPECIFIC**

Each service has allocations criteria agreed with the local Supporting People team which is specified in the services Interim Supporting People Contract. Offering support to people who do not meet these criteria could jeopardise the future funding of the scheme. However, the ultimate decision whether or not to offer housing and support to an individual lies with the organisation. Please see the specific policies & procedures for each Project for further allocation guidance.

### **ALLOCATIONS CRITERIA – GENERAL NEEDS**

**PRHA will consider applications, based on the following criteria, from individuals:**

- In need of the property & services offered;
- Over 18 years of age (Guarantor required for 16-17)
- Able to budget for themselves & manage their tenancy agreement conditions without support;
- Able to negotiate the physical aspects of the building (with necessary adaptations made by the organisation where possible).

### **SOURCES OF APPLICATIONS**

Applicants may apply directly to some of our services, or through referral agencies such as Housing Departments, CAB, Social Services, Probation, Health Authorities, CAT Teams, HPU, and other voluntary agencies.

### **WORKING WITH REFERRAL AGENCIES**

#### **Selecting, Monitoring and Reviewing Referral Agencies**

Each project and service will:

- Maintain a list of referral agencies: to include agencies who specifically work with BME service users and/or under represented groups in the project or service.

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- Make initial telephone contact with all agencies in the area who may be able to refer appropriate service users. Follow this up by mailing the information packs to named individuals, and ensure that regular contact is maintained. A personal visit may be appropriate.
- When setting up a new project, aim to be in contact with potential referral agencies as early as possible in the development process.

## REFERRALS

Agencies must provide in full the following information to the project/service in order to apply for the accommodation based support service:

- A completed in full application form: which includes an assessment of need; accommodation history; benefits entitlement and current contact with support agencies.
- A completed in full risk assessment.

For self referrals the information included in the above documents should be gained at interview stage and where need be further information sought from the applicants support agencies.

**Applications without the above completed in full will not be considered and further information will be sought from the referral agency.**

## HOW APPEALS CAN BE MADE

The applicant/referral agency can appeal against any negative decision in writing within 7 days of the application being rejected. The Project/Service manager will consider the appeal and will take into account all information already provided plus any other information that is available and will make the decision. A decision will be made within 7 days and will be communicated to the applicant/referral agency in writing.

If the applicant/referral agency is still dissatisfied with the decision they have the right to appeal to the Assistant Director Client Services within 7 days following the receipt of the appeal outcome. The Assistant Director will consider the appeal and other information available and will make the decision. A decision will be made within 7 days and will be communicated to the applicant/referral agency in writing. The Assistant Director's decision is final.

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## Sign Up Procedure

### INTRODUCTION

Once an applicant referral has been assessed and accepted, it would then be the responsibility of the Project Worker/Manager to request a sign up appointment via the Housing Services Team. A sign up request form is completed with all the relevant information in regards to the applicant such as:- Name, Date of Birth, benefit income, National Insurance number, contact number etc (Sign-up forms can be requested from the Housing Service Team if you do not have one).

If the request is for an internal move then the reason for this move would need to be stated to ensure this was an adequate move requirement. Once this form is completed, it is to be sent via email to the Housing Services Team mail box to which it would be reviewed and acted upon.

The responsible Housing services member would then complete their required section and confirm an appointment date, time, location and Tenancy start date. This confirmation would then be sent back to the recipient who would need to confirm the appointment was sufficient for the applicant.

### A NEW TENANT

- a) As much information as possible must be obtained about a new tenants ability to pay the charges due before the time of them signing up for a tenancy. National insurance number must be obtained for any future requests for DWP direct deductions if required.
- b) Tenants must be made aware of their obligation to pay rent and service charges at the tenancy sign-up, and of PRHA's arrears policy.
- c) You should seek the initial first weeks rent in advance at the sign-up. If making a HB claim then an estimate of the award should be calculated and any shortfall of charges should be paid in advance by the tenant. If unable to estimate the HB award the resident should be asked for a nominal amount such as £5.00 per week, and for the HB to be paid directly to the Association. The tenant must continue to pay this until the HB claim is assessed and in payment. Any credit accumulated can be refunded if requested, or arrears cleared or arrangement to re-pay.
- d) Housing services staff member who signs up a tenant must ensure that they order an Allpay card after sign up completed. Other

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payment methods such as direct debits can also be arranged through Allpay. In addition, full information on payments methods should be explained to the tenant at the sign-up.

- e) If the tenant is making a HB claim, you must re-enforce that it is their responsibility to ensure that their HB is paid. You should check with the HB department that a valid and complete claim has been received further to submission (GN by the tenant – Supported by the Housing Officer). In Tower Hamlets the verification procedure must be followed and tenants must be advised to bring the relevant documents to the sign up interview. These include proof of income and proof of identity. The Association reserves the right to refuse an applicant who is unable prove the capacity to meet the rental payments either through their own means or through eligibility to state benefits.
- f) Always obtain contact details, phone, mobile, fax, email, family, next of kin, social workers, etc and ensure this is recorded on the Omni ledger software system and the tenancy file.
- g) A post sign-up visit/meeting with fourteen days of the start of the tenancy must include a check on the rent account, and the tenant's obligation to pay rent/chase HB must be re-emphasised. Also, stress that the tenant must let us know about any change in their circumstances likely to affect their HB, or when their benefit is changed.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

- ☐ At point of sign up please ask the customer to sign PRHA's consent form allowing statutory authorities to disclose confidential information to PRHA staff.
- ☐ Assess whether the customer requires any consent to discuss their account with a family member or friend to which we would require signed consent.
- ☐ If consent is obtained then check with housing benefit department for any outstanding overpayments
- ☐ PRHA payments methods should be explained to the service user. Service users should be encouraged to make all payments through the Allpay system and direct debits. Cash payments are not to be encouraged.

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- If it becomes clear that a new tenant may have existing financial difficulties, it may be appropriate to offer debt counselling or money advice at this stage. This may be available locally from the CAB or similar organisation. Also if not a general needs tenant, such support needs should be included in the service users needs assessment where support is being provided.

## Four Weeks Notice – AST & Assured Tenancies

### INTRODUCTION

PRHA like any other RSL have to abide by the terms of the tenancy agreement just as the tenant does. By publishing this requirement as from the tenancy sign up, it will not become a hurdle for the relevant officer to manage when seeking to end a tenancy.

By implementing this from the start of the tenancy life, the tenants are fully prepared for what other RSL's will be seeking from them when they wish to leave any future properties. PRHA lose weeks of revenue due to not complying with this tenancy condition when there is ways of managing it in advance.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR TENANTS BIDDING FOR PROPERTIES OR SHORT NOTICE MOVE

It can be difficult to determine when a tenant may be moving on however, there is ways we can deal with this hurdle when managing move on's.

When you are aware of a tenant is bidding or intending to view properties then the relevant officer would need to advise the tenant to submit there required 4 weeks notice to Housing Services Team. On receipt of this, the Housing Management Team would confirm a 4 week end date of tenancy. This can then be extended in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the notice period which is explained in the confirmation letter sent to the customer. This can be extended for up to a 6 month period under review.

#### For example:-

4 weeks given on a Monday

Tenancy end date (TED) Sunday 4 Weeks from the Monday

Contact the Housing Services Team in the third week of the notice period to advise an extension of a set period of time.

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If the customer does not move within the extension period then again they can contact the Housing Management Team to extend.

This is one way to comply with the tenancy conditions and assist the customer with avoiding dual applications for HB which in most cases would not be accepted for notice periods for there new tenancy. If you require less than the required 4 week notice period then you would need to seek SMT approval and state the reasons why this can not be given.

**For guidance for relinquishment of tenancies for individual cases, please see Procedure for Special Consideration for Relinquishment of AST & Assured HST009.**

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