



Sustainable Allocations and Lettings Policy

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1. Purpose

This policy ensures that North Devon Homes is letting its properties fairly and making best use of its housing whilst making lettings decisions that support the Neighbourhood sustainability.

This policy covers lettings made to our social housing properties, which include social rent, intermediate rent and affordable homes.

This policy ensures that North Devon Homes:

- makes full and effective use of our housing stock, considering the housing applicants' circumstances but also considers the demographic and needs of the local neighbourhood to create sustainable communities.
- allocates properties in an equitable and transparent way.
- allocates its vacant homes efficiently with the minimum loss of rental income.
- works with the local authority as its external partner.

2. Principles

The following principles will apply to this policy:

- It will be open, fair and transparent
- It will promote consistency in the approach for all customers.

3. Review

This policy, procedures and staff training needs will be reviewed at least once every two years to ensure that it continues to operate within best practice, achieve measurable results, and achieve continuous service improvement.

Alternatively, the policy and all associated procedures will be reviewed immediately following any relevant change to government policy, regulation, or legislation.

The Head of Customer and Housing Services will be responsible for ensuring that policy reviews are undertaken, that appropriate consultation takes place and that revisions are reported to the Executive Team for its approval.

4. Responsibilities

The Executive Team has delegated authority to approve this policy. Responsibility for ensuring that this policy is communicated to staff and appropriately implemented is with the Community Services Manager.

Training will be provided for staff to ensure that they fully understand the wider issues surrounding this policy and the relevant procedures.

5. Scope

This policy will cover:

North Devon Homes in the provision of allocating our properties. This will be based on applications, assessed needs and circumstances of an eligible customer where we will aim to provide sustainable lettings.

6. Policy Statement

6.1 Routes into our homes

The majority of allocations are via the Devon Home Choice (DHC) system. North Devon Homes can direct match some residents when working in partnership with North Devon council and other agencies.

a. Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

North Devon Homes is committed to offering its homes based on housing need and customer choice. North Devon Homes works closely with the local authority in North Devon and works in accordance with the partnership arrangements of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme in Devon.

North Devon Homes is committed to using the Choice Based lettings schemes as the principal means of sourcing prospective customers for its vacant homes, but it is also clear that this should not be allowed to compromise either its independence in the letting of its homes, or its ability to seek prospective customers by other means when warranted.

North Devon Homes reserves the right to operate outside of Choice Based Lettings schemes where allocations on a different basis would better meet our business or customer requirements, such as care leavers projects.

North Devon homes may need to apply local lettings criteria to maintain the sustainability of a neighbourhood. These criteria are subject to change depending on the needs of the neighbourhood. At times section 106 restrictions may apply and these will be made clear when the property is advertised.

Adverts will state the number of bedrooms in a home and the number of occupants accepted in that home.

b. Transfers

North Devon Homes does not have an internal Transfer list but where a customer has been allocated a property through the Choice based lettings system and is currently one of North Devon Homes customers they will be treated as a Transfer. Customers who move between our housing stock must ensure their property is Transfer ready.

c. Direct Matches

In exceptional circumstances, where interventions and legal powers may not be adequate, North Devon Homes will consider rehousing customers outside of the CBL system.

These allocations will only be approved in exceptional circumstances and due to serious issues at a customer's current home which both North Devon Homes and North Devon Council agree can only be resolved by relocation in line with DHC policy.

Direct Matches also take the form of:

- Management Moves (including downsizing)
- Mutli agency initiatives, including complex care leavers projects.
- Direct Advertising

Circumstances which would be considered for a direct match may include but are not limited to:

- Serious harassment and or victimisation
- Targeted criminal or anti-social behaviour
- A proven victim of domestic abuse
- Where a customer is under-occupying by at least 2 bedrooms and wishes to move to a smaller home because of affordability concerns

- Relocation due to sustainability of the neighbourhood where all other avenues have been explored and the outcome of a multi-agency approach is agreed.
- Where major refurbishment is identified, and a permanent move is required.

All applications are assessed by the Neighbourhood Services Team and agreed with North Devon council on merit and supported by evidence, such as medical and/or Police reports. Customers granted a management move will be made one offer of suitable accommodation, if declined they will revert to the DHC system.

North Devon Homes also reserves the right to advertise hard to let properties (where no applicant has been successful via DHC) through a direct advertising method.

This may include (but not restricted to), advertising through Rightmove, local lettings agents, newspaper and social media advertising; such properties will also be advertised on 'available now' on the DHC website.

Where properties are advertised through these methods a first come first served approach will be applied.

The first applicant to apply for the property who is eligible, suitable, and able to afford the rent and any other charges on the property will be offered the home.

An applicant's eligibility for the property will be assessed in accordance with the refusals criteria.

Preference for properties will be given to those who require the size and type advertised.

6.2 Eligibility for North Devon Homes Tenancies

To be eligible, all applicants must:

- be over 18 years of age
- be habitually resident in the UK and have the "Right to Rent" in England. If any member of a household applying for housing is found not to have the "Right to Rent" in the UK, the household will not be offered a home.

Applicants will be ineligible for a North Devon Homes tenancy under the following circumstances:

- If they can afford to buy reasonable, appropriate housing in the local area and would thus fall outside the Association's charitable objectives.
- If they have sufficient resources to secure their own accommodation.
- If there is proven evidence that they have breached the terms of a tenancy, including rent arrears and persistent anti-social behaviour that may have included serious damage or neglect to a property.
- If they have outstanding housing related debt to a former landlord; this would normally result in refusal, unless there are reasonable extenuating circumstances which will be reviewed and considered by the Income Manager.
- Applicants who have been convicted of a criminal within the last 5 years.
- Applicants who have been guilty of anti-social behaviour, or other unacceptable behaviour, including a history of causing serious nuisance or annoyance to neighbours, may result in refusal. This can be highlighted through references, criminal convictions or history from previous tenancies/occupations.
- Serious violence towards a neighbour or property, which results in a criminal conviction, for example convictions of murder/manslaughter/arson.
- If there is proven evidence that they have committed or threatened acts of physical violence, harassment or hate related abuse against staff or other North Devon Homes customers.
- If they have current or former customer arrears with North Devon Homes. We will consider exceptions if the applicant is needing to downsize because of a reduction in welfare benefits which means their home is no longer affordable, (any arrears will be managed through former debt or recharge), or if we have identified that their current home is no longer suitable due to medical reasons.
- They do not provide evidence as requested by the Income Officer to confirm they have the means to pay the rent charge within the specified timescales. Evidence to include 3 months bank statements, 3

months' pay-slips (if appropriate) and proof of all debts, including current / past credit cards.

- Applicants who fail an affordability assessment due to insufficient funds available to pay the monthly rent.
- Applicants with support needs which we are unable to meet internally or through an external support agency.
- Applicants who have failed to provide information within a set timeframe will be bypassed or those who provide false information will be refused.
- We will not accept any application from a resident who has been evicted from an NDH property.

Applicants for re-housing who are employees of North Devon Homes, relatives of employees or close connections should declare this when shortlisted for a property and the verification process is completed. These applications will be handled in accordance with our Group Probity, Hospitality, Gifts and Interests policy (BP 106).

North Devon Homes will reject or suspend an application where an applicant is deemed ineligible using the above criteria.

However, North Devon Homes reserves the right to decide on eligibility, on a case-by-case basis and where there are exceptional circumstances, may decide to rehouse an applicant who does not meet the eligibility criteria.

North Devon Homes further reserves the right, in exceptional circumstances, to restrict offers of accommodation that are considered to be inappropriate in relation to any information obtained via a risk assessment or support needs assessment.

6.3 Refusal of eligible bidders

It is recognised that it may be necessary to refuse the offer of a home:

- To persons who present a significant risk to staff, the community or a North Devon Homes property in cases where this can be properly substantiated.
- To persons who have a support need or vulnerability that mean they will be unable to meet the terms and conditions of their tenancy without additional support which it has not been possible to secure.

- To persons who have not been able to view a property and decide on an offer of accommodation within a reasonable time.
- To persons who have failed aspects of North Devon Homes verification process.
- To households who, when assessed against the personal affordability criteria as highlighted in our Financial Inclusion Policy, would be unlikely to successfully sustain a tenancy.
- To bidders who require disability adaptations to make the property under consideration habitable by a household member but where the property is not suitable for those adaptations.
- To persons who fail to meet the criteria set out in North Devon Homes' Pet Policy.

Social housing fraud is a criminal offence, and anyone found to have deliberately lied, provided false information, or withheld information as part of an application will not be accepted as an eligible applicant by North Devon Homes.

A tenancy obtained by deception will be repossessed. If we discover this type of irregularity at the offer stage, we will withdraw the offer.

North Devon Homes procedures will provide for the full assessment of these issues before a decision on the offer of a tenancy is made.

All such decisions should be clearly documented, made known to bidders, and be subject to an internal management review at the bidder's request.

6.4 Rent Affordability and Sustainable Tenancies

North Devon Homes will consider whether individual prospective customers could afford to sustain proposed tenancies by completing an affordability assessment.

All applicants will undergo an affordability assessment to ensure they do not have a deficit in income after all essential outgoings have been taken into consideration.

Exceptions should be made only where it can be shown that the customer's benefit eligibility circumstances will change within a reasonable period in such a way that the tenancy becomes affordable to them.

North Devon Homes will check all information provided by the applicant that is relevant to their eligibility and qualification for an offer of a North Devon Homes home.

This may include inviting the applicant for an interview or completing a home visit, which will be required prior to the applicant being offered a property.

North Devon Homes may check information with other sources in line with DHC Policy/ Law.

Applicants may be required to provide documentary evidence that all persons included on the application are resident at the address supplied at the point of application.

Applicants will also be required to provide any additional proof considered appropriate to confirm their circumstances at any point during their application.

We may ask for references from all applicants' previous landlords or other relevant person. In addition, where there are concerns about risk, risk to self or risk to others, enquiries will be made of relevant organisations.

All incoming customers are required to pay 4 weeks rent in advance.

Applicants will not normally be re-housed if they (or members of their household) have known current rent arrears/debts with their existing landlord; or former customer arrears or rechargeable housing debts (including unpaid deposits) with their existing or former landlord. This also includes any outstanding debts owed to North Devon Homes.

In exceptional circumstances this may be approved if a repayment has been agreed and has been adhered to for a reasonable period.

Under occupation will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there is a need and proven that it is affordable for the incoming customer to under-occupy a property by no more than one bedroom.

A decision on under-occupation will be jointly undertaken by the Neighbourhood Team Leader, patch lead and Neighbourhood Officer.

North Devon Homes is committed to making effective use of its housing stock, minimising the effects of the Welfare Reform Act "Bedroom Tax" on its

customers and assisting partner local authorities in meeting their obligations by releasing family accommodation where possible.

The Choice Based lettings schemes encourage customers who are downsizing by giving them extra priority for moves. Those in need of downsizing are placed in Band B and can bid on their preferred homes on DHC.

To supplement this choice-broadening priority North Devon Homes may offer support to encourage customers occupying homes larger than their needs to move to suitable smaller properties via our downsizing project. This can take many forms and should be discussed with us on a case-by-case basis.

6.5 Local Letting Plans (LLPs) and Section 106 Agreements

Local Lettings Plans (LLPs) are time limited local plans agreed with local authority partners which set out additional agreements about who can be housed within a defined geographical area to meet specific local issues of that area.

The introduction of such plans can assist all agencies involved in tackling problems that exist locally and re-balance the mix of people within the neighbourhood.

Where local lettings plans are in operation these will take precedence over our allocations policy for that particular area or neighbourhood.

For new developments we may use local lettings plans to ensure a mixed community is achieved, such as a mixture of different ages of children in family housing and a mixture of different households in order to achieve a sustainable Neighbourhood, these LLPs will be agreed with the local authority.

On an exceptional basis there may be a requirement to assist in dealing with issues that impact on a small, specific location. This may result in a labelling preference on a singular advert rather than an LLP (Local Lettings Plans), this will be agreed with the local authority.

This may be to:

- Reduce the concentration of certain needs groups which is impacting on housing management.
- Promote a more balanced community by seeking to select / not select households with particular characteristics.

North Devon Homes recognises the need to balance the need to let void properties promptly, in line with challenging targets, with the needs of, often vulnerable, customers seeking to move into its homes.

North Devon Homes recognises that where a property is let under a local authority Section 106 agreement, the terms of the agreement would take precedence over the allocation criteria detailed in this policy.

6.6 Matching homes to appropriate households

North Devon Homes should offer its homes only to households appropriate to the property types and sizes.

North Devon Homes will allocate bedroom need in line with the DHC policy.

North Devon Homes accepts that property sizes can vary and the lettings team will have the final decision on the appropriate family size for each property taking into consideration the bed spaces, property size and maximum occupancy.

For example, some 3 bedroomed houses are only big enough for a family of 2 adults and 2 children, whereas others may be able to accommodate 2 adults and 4 children.

North Devon Homes will make it clear in all adverts what the expected family size would be for each property.

Where properties have adaptations for a disabled person preference will be given to bidders with household members who require the adaptation.

Properties with substantial adaptations including those with level access showers, ramps, stair-lifts, ground-floor bathroom extensions or lowered kitchen surfaces will be let only to bidders who require, or have a household member who requires, the adaptation.

North Devon Homes may decide to under occupy properties to make best use of properties with adaptations, or because the special circumstances of an individual household / neighbourhood warrant a flexible approach.

When disabled applicants apply for a North Devon Homes property that has not been previously adapted, North Devon homes will consider whether the property is still suitable to meet the needs of the applicant.

It is not always possible to adapt a property for disabled applicants and on occasions North Devon Homes will refuse the offer of accommodation on this basis. This decision will be made by the appropriate manager.

6.7 Tenure types

North Devon Homes will offer the following tenancy types:

- Assured tenancies: North Devon Homes will offer Starter tenancies which convert into full assured tenancies after 12 months, following a successful tenancy review.
- Assured shorthold tenancies where there is a need to take the property back after a period of time- normally for development purposes. These types of tenancy will be clearly advertised as short hold tenancies and the implications of this will be clearly explained.
- Market rents advertised as such, normally through an outside agency.

North Devon Homes will also offer Assured tenancies on the following rent types:

- Social Rents - this is a rent level that is set at a target rent or 'formula rent.'
- Affordable Rent - this is a rent level which is up to 80% of market rent.
- Intermediate Tenancies - rent level which NDH have set at Local Housing Allowance rate.

Rents are set in accordance with the Rent Setting Policy.

6.8 Monitoring, Consultation and Review

North Devon Homes will monitor the outcomes of lettings to ensure that the best use is made of its housing, and that it is contributing to sustainable communities.

It will also record all its lettings in the Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) system and has a framework of performance indicators for lettings and wider void management.

North Devon Homes will take prompt action to identify reasons for any underperformance and will tackle barriers to delivery.

7. Consultation

The following have been consulted in developing the policy:

Date	Consultation methodology	Challenge / impact / result
17.10.2022	Customer Group – Fresh Ideas Meetings	Policy agreed with some edits
20.06.2023	In Person -Income Manager, Customer Service Manager, Head of Asset management, Community Services Manager	Policy agreed with some edits

8. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 Potential impact on each of the diversity “groups.”

Strand	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Comments / evidence (if negative impact, how does the policy address this)?
Race	X			
Disability	X			
Gender	X			
Gender reassignment	X			
Sexual orientation	X			
Religion or belief	X			
Age	X			
Rural issues	X			
Social Inclusion issues			X	
Pregnancy and maternity	X			
Marriage and civil partnership	X			

8.2 Does the Policy promote equality of opportunity?

Yes

The policy promotes equality of opportunity due to the impact of improved neighbourhood cohesion due to getting the allocation right first time and, therefore, increasing the sustainability of the neighbourhood.

Next review date:		Responsible Officer
Every two years October 2025		Head of Customer and Housing Services
Author		Related Documents
Neighbourhood Team Leader		