



Title of policy:	Access to Housing Policy
Version:	2
Updated:	August 2022
Next review:	August 2023
By:	Head of Customers

Introduction

North Star owns and manages around 3900 properties covered by:

- Stockton Borough Council*
- Middlesbrough Borough Council*
- Redcar & Cleveland Council*
- Darlington Borough Council*
- Hambleton District Council
- Richmondshire District Council
- Durham County Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Sunderland City Council

We are a partner, together with the local authorities marked * above in the Tees Valley Lettings Homefinder choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme. In these areas, we have adopted the common allocations policy.

We have fully adopted the Durham Key Options CBL scheme for properties in Teesdale and County Durham.

For properties in North Yorkshire, the Homechoice CBL scheme has been adopted.

These partnerships ensure we meet the legal requirements of the Localism Act 2011, the Housing Act (1996) and the Homeless Act (2002).

This policy outlines additional criteria across our general needs stock.

Background

This policy takes into account the Government social housing reforms as set out in the Localism Act 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced measures to reduce the amount of welfare benefit that a household can receive. It introduced the social sector size criterion which applies to all working age households who are under occupying their home.

This policy is mindful of the risks posed to North Star's financial viability by way of a range of cuts to welfare as well as the cost-of-living crisis and as such, takes a balanced and proportionate approach to mitigate these risks.



We recognise the changes to welfare benefits will adversely affect some residents and may lead to financial hardship and we will apply this policy where appropriate. As a responsible landlord, we need to ensure that we rent our properties to people who can afford them. There is a proven link between debt and physical and mental health issues caused by financial hardship. We have a duty as a landlord to ensure we are not putting people in a position where they can not realistically afford their tenancy. This is particularly important as a housing related debt will deny people access to social housing in the future.

We will comply with all current legal and regulatory requirements when letting our homes.

We are committed to preventing and reducing homelessness and as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to refer any individual or household if we consider they are, or may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.

We will not normally hold our own waiting list. In all areas where we have stock, CBL schemes exist. Applicants will register and bid for our properties which will be advertised through the relevant scheme.

Where there is no demand through CBL, direct offers of accommodation can be made subject to the applicant being eligible, their circumstances being verified, and references from current or former landlords being acquired.

We seek to let our homes in a responsible manner and want to create sustainable tenancies and communities and avoid establishing tenancies that will fail. We will do this through various local lettings policies and by completing affordability and tenancy risk assessments.

We will work in partnership with the local authority where a local lettings policy may be required for a new site or scheme.

We will ensure any local lettings policies balance the competing demands of local housing need to address the specific issues in a neighbourhood. Local lettings policies will be regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to meet the original aims.

In some emergency cases, there will be a need to provide immediate rehousing and it may not be possible to accommodate this within the normal arrangements. Managed moves will be considered where there are circumstances that would seriously affect the tenant or members of their family. Examples of this can be where there has been a fire, safeguarding etc.

Supported Housing

We have a range of supported housing schemes such as Extra Care, women's refuges, learning disability schemes, etc. Applicants for these schemes must need the support provided and will be allocated tenancies/licences through the various local authority assessment criteria.

Eligibility

All applicants for housing must be in some form of housing need. Anyone over the age of 16 can apply to join the Housing Register through the various CBL schemes.

We are unable to offer any tenancy where the applicant or an adult who is part of the household does not meet the "Right to Rent" in accordance with the Immigration Act 2014.

Section 106 and Planning Conditions

Certain properties are covered by a Section 106 Agreement or other planning conditions. Some agreements specify a minimum age or restrict offers to those applicants that have a local



connection to the area. The local connection is defined in different ways and is specific to the property/area. We will let our properties in accordance with any such agreement. Each agreement may vary dependent on the individual local authority.

Successions and Assignments

We may allow an existing occupier to succeed, take over the tenancy or become a joint tenant of the property they currently live in. Other than the statutory right of succession, any persons who are allocated a tenancy in this way must meet our eligibility criteria. A separate policy covers succession and assignments.

Affordability and Assessments

We will require an applicant to demonstrate their ability to manage and sustain their tenancy. We may refuse to let a property where an applicant is unable to demonstrate their ability to manage a tenancy or where applicants need a level of support which we or another provider cannot provide.

Where we refuse an offer of accommodation, we will give clear reasons why. We will provide advice and support to assist the applicant to find alternative accommodation or to maximise their income to be able to afford and sustain a tenancy.

We will carry out an affordability assessment to ensure the property is affordable. An affordability assessment will be made when an applicant is successful at bidding and before an offer of accommodation is made. This will provide the prospective new tenant with an opportunity to assess their means to take on a tenancy and review their outgoings to consider how they will budget in the future. Our Welfare Benefits and Tenancy Sustainment Officers will also carry out checks to ensure any prospective tenant is receiving all the income and benefits they are entitled to.

If there are concerns in respect to how the prospective tenant will manage their budgeting or where the assessment may indicate a risk, additional support may be offered during the introductory period of their tenancy.

Reasonable Adjustments

North Star is committed to improving accessibility to all our customers.

This policy has been developed in accordance with North Star's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy to ensure equality of treatment for all our customers.

North Star is committed to provide any reasonable adjustments to our service to ensure that no one is disadvantaged in using this policy. We will discuss with individuals their specific needs, but some examples could be:

- Providing information and responses in large print on request.
- Allowing extra time to respond in timescales.
- Providing a language interpreter.
- Monitoring customer access and satisfaction in all areas
- Providing additional support for customers with communication or learning disabilities.
- Providing additional support for customers with physical/mental health conditions.

Monitoring and Evaluation



We will record and monitor the effect of the above on our lettings to ensure that our policy is fair, and we are only using this criterion where appropriate.

Right to Appeal

We will use our complaints procedure for anyone who wants to appeal if they feel that they have been treated unfairly.

