



Title of policy:	Access to Housing Policy
Version:	3
Purpose:	The purpose of the policy is to set out how we allocate our homes meeting regulatory and legal requirements.
Updated:	April 2024
Next review:	April 2025
By:	Head of Customers

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out how we allocate our homes ensuring fair and equal access.

Scope of The Policy

As a landlord we reserve the right to maintain control of access to our housing by allocating the right people to the right homes and ensuring our neighbourhoods are sustainable and safe.

The policy does not apply to our supported housing schemes/properties where we have separate processes set in accordance with statutory legislation and in line with our various local authority contracts.

Aims and Objectives

The key aims and objectives of this policy are:

To meet our Regulatory Requirements within the Tenancy Standard

- Work with our local authority partners to meet our regulatory requirements and support our corporate objectives.
- Support local authorities in the delivery of their statutory obligations where possible.
- Monitor the effectiveness of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Schemes
- Record all lettings as required by CORE
- Ensure our properties are let as efficiently as possible.

Ensure the property is affordable and therefore sustainable.

- We will carry out an affordability assessment with prospective customers with regards to ensure their home is affordable.
- Where affordability is not demonstrated we will not offer housing to the applicant however we may consider an offer to an alternative property dependent on their circumstances.



Ensure neighbourhoods are sustainable and safe.

- With our partners, we will promote the development of sustainable and safe neighbourhoods.
- Analyse and understand the nature of demand and provide and develop appropriate responses.

Access to services

- We will ensure access to housing is applied in accordance with the Equality Act 2010
- We will promote mutual exchanges via Homeswapper.
- We will work with partners to provide the appropriate advice or signposting about customers housing options.

Background

In accordance with Tenancy Standard, The Regulator of Social Housing states “Registered Providers must allocate and let their homes in a fair, transparent, and efficient way that takes the needs of tenants and prospective tenants into account”.

This policy outlines additional criteria across our general needs stock.

In operating this policy, we will comply with all current legal and regulatory requirements when letting our homes including.

- Regulatory Framework for Social Housing (Tenancy standard)
- Housing Act 1996 Part VI
- Equality Act 2010
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017

Access to Housing

North Star owns and manages around 3900 properties covered by:

- Stockton Borough Council*
- Middlesbrough Borough Council*
- Redcar & Cleveland Council*
- Darlington Borough Council
- North Yorkshire 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 CBL scheme. In these areas, we have adopted the common allocations policy.

We are a full partner in the Durham Key Options CBL letting scheme and allocate all our properties in County Durham and Teesdale in accordance with their common allocations policy.



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

For allocations in Darlington and Hartlepool, we have adopted the respective local authorities' allocations policy.

Details of the policies North Star operate due to our partnerships in CBL schemes are available on the relevant CBL websites. We will regularly review the operational effectiveness of our CBL partnerships and will seek to exit these arrangements if they do not support our aims.

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 verified, and references from current or former landlords being acquired.

We are committed to preventing and reducing homelessness and as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 we will refer any individual or household to the local authority who have the strategic responsibility for homelessness if we consider they are or may be threatened with homelessness.

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 in partnership with local authorities through local lettings policies where appropriate. 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, members of their family or the public. Examples of this can be where there has been a fire, safeguarding, domestic abuse etc.

Eligibility

Eligibility and qualifying person criteria to apply on the housing registers is determined by the CBL partnership agreements and local authorities.

Whilst we will assist local authorities in meeting their duties to house households who are homeless and in housing need, we will not consider the following applicants.

- A person from abroad who is subject to immigration control.
- A person from abroad with no recourse to public funding
- A person who fails the "right to rent" check.

Applicants through our partnership arrangements must be able to provide evidence of identification and housing need. In addition, the applicant will need to provide references before an offer of accommodation can be made.

These may vary subject if there are any planning conditions attached but can include the following:

- Current or previous landlord reference
- Current or previous employer reference
- Character reference from person known to the applicant.



It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide all relevant information.

We will usually offer properties to applicants aged 18 and over. We will consider granting tenancies to those aged over 16 in accordance with the local authorities Childrens Services under the Children Act 1998.

Where we will consider a tenancy to an applicant under the age of 18, we would require written guarantee to any unpaid costs in relation to the tenant until they are 18.

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.

Mutual Exchanges

The Tenancy Standard states registered providers “must support relevant tenants living in eligible housing to mutually exchange their homes”.

North Star meets this requirement through the Homeswapper scheme. A separate policy covers mutual exchanges.

Affordability and Assessments

We will require an applicant to demonstrate their ability to manage and sustain their tenancy.

An affordability assessment will be carried out with the prospective customer before an offer is made.

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.

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.

Tenancy Fraud

North star is committed to tackling tenancy fraud. A separate policy covers Tenancy Fraud.

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 and prospective customers.

North Star is committed to providing 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

All CBL schemes have an appeal procedure to enable any applicant who has been refused access to the housing register/CBL scheme the right to appeal. Details of these are on the relevant CBL website.

North Star operates a Complaints Policy where customers can complain about any aspect of the service with which they are unhappy with. Further details on complaints can be found on our website www.northstarhg.co.uk

