



Access to Housing Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fortis Living's aim is to provide good quality affordable housing for people who have a housing need. Housing need may arise because people are inadequately housed or because they are facing homelessness and they cannot access other forms of tenure in the local housing market due to their income levels or other circumstances.

Fortis Living has housing in all districts of Worcestershire as well as Herefordshire, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire. We are committed to increasing the provision of high quality housing locally and to making the best use of our existing housing stock to meet residents' and applicants' needs. To achieve this, we will provide most new homes and a proportion of re-let properties at affordable rents and new tenants will be offered a fixed term tenancy comprising of a Starter Tenancy followed by a 5 Year fixed term (with the exception of Housing for Older People).

This allocations policy applies to lettings of Fortis Living properties let as social and affordable rent housing. This includes lettings to new applicants and to existing Fortis tenants applying to transfer. The policy does not cover the allocation of Intermediate Rent, Intermediate Rent to Buy, Shared Ownership, student rented or market rented properties. These are covered by separate lettings policies.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

It is our intention to enable customers to make informed choices about their housing options within the constraints of supply, demand and resource availability. We participate in existing Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes across our operating areas including HomeChoice Plus (South Worcestershire) Herefordshire HomePoint and Gloucestershire Homeseeker

We will continue to use allocations and lettings schemes to ensure we are able to achieve our objectives of meeting local housing need and making best use of our housing stock.

Existing CBL schemes have their own allocations policy which is published by each CBL Partnership. These CBL allocation policies are subject to review and may change in line with legislation, best practice and local priorities.

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The CBL partnerships have ensured the development of consistent procedures for advertising properties, shortlisting, selecting tenants and allocating homes which are open and fair, and which ensure that those in the greatest housing need can apply for accommodation and are given appropriate priority for housing.

Fortis Living works to these policies, however we retain our own allocations policy to ensure our homes are allocated to reflect the needs of the business and our tenants.

3.LEGISLATION AND REGULATION

In March 2012 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) published its standards for Registered Providers. The regulatory standards contain the outcomes that providers are expected to achieve and the specific expectations of the HCA as regulator. The Regulatory Guidance requires that our services are shaped around existing and prospective residents' needs and that we can demonstrate that our services are relevant and accessible to customers. We are required to let our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way taking into account the housing needs and aspirations of our tenants and potential tenants. We are required to demonstrate how our lettings make best use of our housing stock, and contribute to local authorities' strategic housing functions and sustainable communities.

We will work in partnership with Local Authorities to enable them to fulfil their duties under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002, as amended.

We are committed to the principles of equality and diversity which are reflected within our Equality and Diversity Policy, action plans and impact assessments.

Fortis Living will work to 'build successful communities'. In order to achieve this aim, local lettings policies may be implemented to encourage and support the sustainability and mix of residents in housing schemes or on estates.

Our allocations policy is made widely available to customers and is available in a range of formats upon request.

4.ADVERTISING OUR HOMES

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With the exception a property withheld for direct matching all available properties are advertised on a CBL scheme bidding cycle. Examples of lettings that may be made by direct matching include:-

- Where a property is required for emergency re-housing of existing tenants or for households with specialist housing requirements.
- Allocations at our Extra Care and Very Sheltered Housing Schemes, Foyers and any other specialist housing schemes will be carried out by review teams with an agreed allocations policy and allocations panel.

The policy and procedure for allocating tenancies in Fortis Living Extra Care Housing schemes can be found at **Appendix A**.

5. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

AGE

Fortis Living will accept applications from those over the age of 16 years but will not normally offer a tenancy until they reach the age of 18 years, except in exceptional circumstances.

Where a tenancy is to be offered to applicants aged 16 and 17 this would normally be subject to the availability of a rent guarantor. A guarantor can be any responsible adult over 18 years of age, known to the applicant or an agency such as Children's Services.

Where a young person qualifies for assistance under the Children (Leaving Care) Act, The Local Authority Children's Services team would be expected to meet their housing costs until they reach the age of 18.

INCOME

In order for us to be compliant with our Charitable Status, households must have an annual gross income of less than £60k and capital, savings and equity of less than £50k. We will, however, consider an individual's housing need in making their assessment.

Where households own their own home, regard will be given to the policies of the relevant CBL scheme. We will consider the following when making an assessment of eligibility for an allocation:

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- A need for older persons accommodation
- A household/medical need that cannot be met in the open market
- A household that is statutorily overcrowded and their needs cannot be met in the open market.
- Where a property is statutorily unfit or in need of major works for which the household cannot foreseeably obtain grant or finance themselves.
- Where the applicant is a joint owner but due to irretrievable relationship breakdown cannot remain in the home and the home cannot be sold without placing dependent children in a potentially homeless situation.
- Where the property must be sold as part of a divorce settlement and the applicant's share of the capital released is insufficient to consider alternative affordable housing options or open market purchase.

In assisting applicants in these circumstances we may also require the following assessments:

- A declaration to be signed before the tenancy start date confirming that the property will be actively marketed and sold as soon as possible. Consideration will be given as to actual equity, the cost of suitable private accommodation and also the type of accommodation requested.
- In cases of medical/special needs, the availability in the private sector of the type of housing required in the vicinity of the applicant's choice; the cost of available accommodation compared with the applicants equity and ability to finance a mortgage.
- In cases of over-crowding or an unfit property, the cost of appropriate accommodation in the vicinity of the applicant's choice compared with the applicant's equity and ability to finance a mortgage.

If there is reasonable doubt about the applicant's ability to obtain and sustain a move in the private sector, then he/she should be eligible for social housing.

PERSONS FROM ABROAD

We will, through the respective Choice Based Lettings schemes, and this allocations policy, have regard to Section 160A of the Housing Act and subsequent legislation in considering applications from persons from abroad. Checks will be carried out to ensure that applicants are eligible to be considered for an allocation of accommodation.

6. EXCLUSIONS

Some applicants may be excluded from being allocated a Fortis Living home due to their previous or present behaviour/actions or the behaviour /actions of a member of their household they may to be housed with.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Fortis Living will not consider an applicant for an allocation of accommodation if we are satisfied that they, or a member of their household, have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant, and at the time of allocation is considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of that behaviour.

Applicants will not be considered for an allocation if they, or a member of their household, have within the last 2 years been found guilty of anti-social behaviour serious enough to result in an outright possession order, ASBO or injunction if they had been tenants. Applicants may be excluded if there is evidence that they, their partner, or a member of their household who is to be rehoused with them, will represent a serious threat or nuisance to existing tenants, neighbours or staff.

This includes, but is not restricted to situations where:

- There has been unacceptable behaviour which would have led to a possession order under Section 84 of the Housing Act 1985, as amended, other than Ground 8.
- There is a conviction for committing an indictable offence in or near the home and there remains a threat to neighbours or the wider community.

If there is reason to believe that an applicant's unacceptable behaviour is due to a physical, mental or learning disability, we will not treat the person as ineligible without first considering whether he or she would be able to maintain a tenancy with appropriate care and support.

We will consider the type and location of accommodation and may be of the view that an allocation in an alternative locality may be more appropriate and sustainable. We may work with partners and support agencies to ensure that a care plan or support package is in place to support the success of a tenancy.

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ARREARS

Applicants with rent arrears or other forms of indebtedness to a current or former landlord may be allowed to register and bid for properties depending on each CBL scheme's policy and may be subject to restrictions such as a reduced banding where housing debts are outstanding. However, any allocation of a Fortis tenancy will be conditional upon the debt(s) being cleared in full. This will include rent arrears, court costs and rechargeable repairs due to a landlord. In exceptional circumstances consideration may be given to applicants who have existing repayment arrangements which have been sustained for a minimum of 6 months. Account will be taken of the circumstances surrounding how these debts were accrued, for example, whether they were due to ill health, unemployment or domestic abuse and where the applicant may not have had control of their finances.

If a duty has been accepted by the Local Authority under the provisions of the homelessness legislation, and arrears exist, each case will be considered individually and existing repayment arrangements may be considered. Account will be taken of the circumstances under which the arrears were accrued, for example, where they were due to ill health, unemployment or domestic abuse and where the applicant may not have had control of their finances.

If an applicant is re-housed with a former tenancy debt this debt will be included in the tenancy agreement to ensure that the monies are recovered.

CONDITION OF PROPERTY

If an applicant or a member of their household, has caused damage to, or has neglected one of our homes, or that of another Housing Association partner, or is known to have neglected or damaged any other property, the applicant will not be considered for an allocation of alternative accommodation. Exceptions may apply and each case will be considered individually.

HARASSMENT/VIOLENCE/DRUG RELATED ACTIVITIES

Where there is evidence that the applicant, their partner, or a member of the household being rehoused, has been the perpetrator or has incited others to be involved in harassment, violence, or abuse to others, or has been involved in drug related activities, which has impacted upon the community (eg supplying drugs), then they may not be considered for an allocation. This includes perpetrators of

domestic abuse who have been found guilty in the magistrates' court rather than the civil courts. Each case will be considered individually.

RE-HOUSING OF OFFENDERS

Fortis Living believes that as a social housing provider we can make a vital contribution to community safety through the provision of mainstream accommodation for offenders. However, we recognise that it is essential that such provision should be based on an informed and individual assessment of risk, and decisions should be made in conjunction with other key agencies such as the police and social services.

We will continue to participate, where appropriate, in Public Protection Meetings and joint protocols and with the National Offender Management Scheme.

As a landlord we recognise that we have a duty of care to all parties and we will not offer accommodation to offenders who have been found guilty of offences such that their behaviour makes them unsuitable to be a tenant or would pose a significant risk to the communities into which they are housed. Due regard will be paid to when the offences were committed and any changes in behaviour since that time.

Allocations to applicants from the excluded groups must be agreed by the Head of Allocations in consultation with the appropriate Housing Manager.

There is a right of appeal against any decision not to consider an applicant for an offer of accommodation. This should be in writing within 21 days of the date of the decision letter and addressed to the Assistant Director of Housing and Community Services.

7. PROVISION OF FALSE INFORMATION

Where applicants have misrepresented facts or omitted to provide information pertinent to their application any offer of accommodation will be withdrawn. If an applicant refuses or fails to provide further information to allow us to make a decision on their eligibility, the application will be referred back to the Choice Based Lettings scheme administrators to be considered for rejection.

If an applicant is found to have secured a tenancy with Fortis Living as a result of misrepresentation, possession proceedings will be taken to end the tenancy.

8. INTERNAL TRANSFERS OF EXISTING TENANTS

Existing Fortis Living tenants can register for a transfer and their housing needs will be assessed in the same way as other applicants.

Existing tenants will only be considered for a transfer to alternative accommodation if:

- The tenant does not have a starter tenancy.
- Their rent account is up to date with no outstanding court costs, former tenancy debts or charges for rechargeable repairs. This may be checked at time of allocation and at time of sign-up. If an offer has been made but the rent account is not clear at time of sign-up, the offer will be withdrawn.
- There are no breaches of the tenancy agreement.
- Their current property, including the garden, passes the pre-void inspection and requires only a gas and electric check before re-letting. If repairs are needed (other than repairs resulting from fair wear and tear) residents will not be permitted to move but given details of what works must be carried out so that a move at a later date can be agreed.

Older tenants moving to downsize may be allowed to move with outstanding repair works at their current home. Approval for such a move will be considered by the Head of Allocations or Asst. Director Housing & Community Services.

If a tenant of Fortis Living makes a successful bid on Choice Based Lettings but fails to meet the above criteria, they will be advised of the reason(s) why.

If residents for whom we have undertaken adaptations wish to transfer or mutually exchange to another property, Fortis Living may use its discretion to decide whether permission should be granted for such a move to take place. Any decision will be made in accordance with the appropriate legislation. Each case will be reviewed taking into account individual circumstances and needs. This will include the impact of Housing Benefit restrictions on levels of occupancy.

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If a resident's circumstances have altered so that their continued occupation is in breach of a local lettings plan, appropriate priority will be given to their application for a transfer.

DECANTS

Existing tenants may be moved (decanted) either temporarily or permanently if vacant possession of their existing property is required to carry out major repairs or demolition. Permanent decants and temporary decants will usually be achieved by a Direct Match to suitable void property and will be approved by the Head of Allocations or Asst. Director Housing & Community Services.

URGENT MANAGEMENT TRANSFERS (UMT)

So far as it is possible we will use the Choice Based Lettings Schemes to allocate our accommodation and meet housing needs. However, we recognise that there may be exceptional circumstances where the only way an exceptionally urgent housing need can be resolved is through the use of a management transfer. In the interests of fairness to all applicants these circumstances are kept to a minimum and will only be considered when all other avenues have been pursued including action against offenders and supporting the work of appropriate agencies such as the Police.

Examples of exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to :

- Threat to life
- Emergency cases whose homes are damaged by fire, flood or other disaster may be provided with another tenancy if it is not possible to repair the existing home, or if any work to repair is to take such a long period of time that there will be serious disruption to family life.
- Households who, on police advice, must be moved immediately due to serious threats to a member or members of a household, or whose continuing occupation would pose a threat to the community.

In each case relocation will be achieved through a direct match to suitable alternative accommodation. All requests for an urgent Management Transfer must be approved by a Housing Manager and authorised by Assistant Director Housing & Community Services. Where an Urgent Management Transfer is approved only one offer of suitable alternative housing will be made.

9. PETS

Fortis Living has developed an RSPCA accredited policy for the keeping of pets and we welcome responsible pet owners as long as their pets are well behaved, kept under control and tenants keep within the law. We also recognise that some types of accommodation are not suited to pets such as cats and dogs and adverts for properties on Choice Based Lettings will indicate if pets are permitted. Local Lettings Plans will also state if pets are allowed.

Tenants must have Fortis Living Housing's permission to keep pets. Where permission is granted, the pets must not cause a nuisance to neighbours or visitors to the property

10. APPLICANT INTERVIEWS

It is not possible to offer home visits to all applicants. Where there is, however, an issue as to the banding for an application e.g for overcrowding or medical need, or where there is evidence that the applicant may be under the threat of homelessness, a home visit may be arranged by the appropriate organisation e.g Home Choice Plus, Home Point, or Fortis Living

Transfer applicants who are being considered for a move will have a pre-void home visit by a Housing Officer and Maintenance Inspector. If the tenant's current home is not at the lettable standard, the tenant will be advised that they will not be permitted to move on this occasion and advised what remedial works need to be done before a move can be agreed.

Where an applicant or existing resident is being considered for a move to a new build property a home visit will always be carried out. If the home is not in good order then a move will not be approved. If a resident is not permitted to move to a new build home they will be advised of the reason(s) why.

If an applicant is being considered for an allocation and it is identified that their record is not up to date on any of the Choice Based Lettings Schemes or if the Allocating Officer has concerns that the banding is incorrect, this will be referred back to the relevant CBL scheme administrator

11. SUPPORT NEEDS

A range of services are available across our operating areas to support applicants who have particular needs. Referrals to support services or agencies may be identified at a number of stages – application, allocation, sign-up or six weeks home visits.

If there are concerns that an applicant may not be able to sustain a tenancy without support, evidence will be required to show that a support plan is in place before a tenancy is agreed. The allocation will only proceed when we are satisfied that appropriate support is in place.

12. OFFERING A HOME

SELECTION OF APPLICANTS

Applicants can register their interest in properties that are advertised each week as long as they are eligible for that size and type of property.

A short list of applicants in 'band' and date order will then be drawn off each CBL system each week.

The property will be offered to the eligible household with the highest band who has been registered for the longest. The exception to this will be where the advertisement specifies preference to a particular band or client group eg silver band or preference given to transfer applicants, or where a Section 106 planning restriction applies.

In the event that two households are 'equal' a decision on the allocation will be made by a the Head of Allocations who will review both applications and take into consideration the property, the household and level of housing need in making the allocation decision.

If there are specific requirements for the property, for example, where a Section 106 Agreement or Local Lettings Policy requires applicants to have a local connection to an area, the top priority applicant may be bypassed until an eligible applicant is found. The reason for over-riding any applicant will be recorded by the allocating officer on the system.

Following a successful bid on the respective Choice Based Lettings Schemes, a provisional offer of accommodation is made and applicants will have up to 3 days

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to confirm they would like to be considered. Only one offer will be made to an applicant at any one time. In the majority of cases, properties will be pre-allocated.

Applicants will be asked to provide evidence to confirm their circumstances and if they fail to do this within three days, we will move on to the next household on the shortlist.

Where an applicant, or a member of their household, has a need for aids and adaptations, an offer may not be made if the property under consideration is not suitable for adaptation. We will liaise with the relevant health professionals where there is a need for adapted accommodation or accommodation that is capable of being adapted.

TENANCY TYPES OFFERED AND NEW TENANCY MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Fortis Living has developed an Affordable Rent & Flexible Tenancy Policy that describes the types of tenancy to be offered to incoming tenants in differing circumstances. All tenancy types used will require rent to be paid in advance and a specific rent payment may be required prior to a tenant being granted access to their new home. All CBL adverts will set out advance rent payments required and will explain that rent payments are to be made by Direct Debit as the required method of payment.

Prospective new tenants may also be required to attend “pre-tenancy” training interviews or meetings with staff who will be managing their tenancy. Attendance at pre-tenancy events may be considered as a pre-requisite for the granting of a tenancy.

13. LOCAL LETTINGS PLANS

Fortis Living is keen to encourage the development of sustainable communities. In order to achieve this aim, a local lettings plan (LLP) may operate on schemes where there is an identified need to do so. Clear policy objectives will be set for such schemes in order that outcomes can be measured.

Where Local Lettings Policies are operated, preference will be given to applicants who meet the LLP criteria. We will monitor the operation of all such policies to ensure that there is no discrimination, directly or indirectly, on racial or other

equality grounds. Local Lettings Policies will also be evaluated every three years to ensure that they remain relevant and appropriate.

14. REFUSALS

If a property is refused, the applicant will be asked to complete a refusal form giving their reasons for refusal in order to inform management decisions on property types, locations and possibly future investment.

If the refusal brings into doubt the validity of an applicant's banding this will be reviewed at time of refusal eg if an applicant has a high banding due to acute medical need and bids for and refuses suitable alternative accommodation, their medical need may be reviewed. This will be dealt with by the relevant Choice Based Lettings scheme administrators.

15. PROPERTY ELIGIBILITY

It is important that the Group makes best use of its housing stock when allocating properties and, subject to local lettings plans and Section 106 agreements and covenants, the following broad principles will apply when considering the type and size of household that any applicant may be offered:

PROPERTY TYPE	ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS
1 bedroom flats	Single Persons/Couples over 18
2 bedroom flats	Families with 1 or 2 children*
3 bedroom flats	Families with 2 or 3 children*
1 bedroom houses	Single Persons/Couples over 18
2 bedroom houses	Families with 1 or 2 children*
3 bedroom houses	Families with 2 or 3 children*
4 bedroom houses	Families with 3 or 4 children*

- * Depending upon the ages and gender of the children this number may be increased.
- * Households with children under the age of 5 will not be considered for flats above the first floor.
- * A child is determined to be a person aged 16 or under.
- * Household members studying away from home in full-time courses will not be considered in bedroom entitlement unless they are the main applicant.

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- * Households consisting of 2 or 3 adults with no dependent children will be considered for flat type accommodation
- * An unborn child will be considered as part of a household at 25 weeks of pregnancy when deciding upon eligibility for accommodation. A household without existing children will at that point become eligible for two bedroom accommodation.
- * Two children of different gender under the age of 10 will be expected to share and two children of the same gender will be expected to share until the age of 16.

The allocation of family sized housing will be dependent upon the physical dimensions of the property in that some two bedroom properties may only be suitable for a household with one child, whilst others may accommodate two children. Similarly some three and four bedroom properties will accommodate households with more than four children.

We recognise that the sharing policy is different to that of the Choice Based Lettings Schemes when determining overcrowding.

Visiting children on access arrangements will not be considered as part of an applicant's household in deciding upon eligibility for accommodation.

We also have due regard to all restrictions on payment of Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit. **If households are likely to claim Housing Benefit /UC housing element and may have "spare" bedrooms they will be advised at sign-up of the consequences of a failure to pay any shortfall.**

BUNGALOWS AND OLDER PERSON'S HOUSING

1 bedroom bungalows (non-sheltered) Single Persons/Couples aged 40 and over or in receipt of PIP care or mobility component. Both applicant and partner must be over the age of 40 if not in receipt of PIP/DLA.

2 bedroom bungalows (non-sheltered) – Single person/ couples aged 40 and over or in receipt of PIP care or mobility component with no dependent children resident. The exception to this will be where the child is the recipient of the disability benefit.

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A single person aged 40 or over or in receipt of PIP/Disability Living Allowance care or mobility component with a child over the age of 18 living with them may be considered. Preference will be given to couples over single person households. Where a bungalow forms part of an older persons housing scheme, it will be allocated to households where the minimum age is 55 for all applicants and household members.

Accommodation within an older persons housing scheme will usually be allocated to applicants over the age of 55 who may or may not have a need for support.

An applicant will not be eligible for an extra room for a carer unless an assessment has been carried out by Social Care agency or Health Services which confirms that overnight live-in support is required on a full-time basis.

16. RURAL HOUSING AND LOW DEMAND HOUSING

In rural communities where there remains little social rented housing stock, Fortis Living will aim to support and maintain existing communities. At the time of advertising the property, account will be taken of the numbers and types of social rented housing remaining in the community, and, whilst preference will be given in line with the above allocations policy, we will also consider households who do not meet the criteria above eg a single person or a childless couple may be considered for family sized housing if no other suitable applicants have bid for the property. This would be subject to any Local Lettings Plans or Section 106 Agreements that may exist. An affordability assessment would be carried out in the event that there are Housing Benefit restrictions.

17. UNDER OCCUPATION

To make best use of existing housing stock and to help under-occupying tenants to move, properties may be advertised as giving preference to residents under occupying one of our properties. Where a resident has expressed a wish to move to more appropriate accommodation, such as a bungalow or older persons housing, they will be entitled to bid for properties with one more bedroom than usually allowed. eg a single person will be considered for a two bedroom bungalow or flat if they are freeing up a 3 bedroom house, subject to an affordability check.

18. RESTRICTIONS ON HOUSING ASSOCIATION LETTINGS TO BOARD MEMBERS, EMPLOYEES, INVOLVED RESIDENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Fortis Living will only assist with the re-housing of Board Members, Employees, Involved Residents and their family members in accordance with the rules and guidance set out in the Fortis Living Probity Policy.

19. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

APPEALS

Applicants have the right to make an appeal if unhappy with any decision including decisions not to offer accommodation,

COMPLAINTS

If an applicant who is also an existing Fortis Living customer is unhappy with the way in which they have been dealt with, and the matter cannot be resolved through the informal complaint process, the Fortis Living formal complaints procedure should be followed.

20. ACCESS TO PERSONAL INFORMATION

Applicants have a legal right to inspect their housing application file or computer record. In both instances, access to information can only be withheld where the information has been provided by a third party and their consent to the disclosure of that information has not been obtained. A period of notice is required before any information can be released. A charge may be levied.

21. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

Fortis Living is committed to developing an organisational culture which values people from all sections of the community and the contribution each individual can make to our work. This means that we value each individual in their own right, regardless of whether or not they belong to any particular section of society.

Effective monitoring of lettings outcomes will be routinely undertaken and the evaluation of this fed back into policy and service developments.

22. LINKS WITH OTHER POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Supporting Vulnerable Residents Policy
- Affordable Rent & Flexible Tenancy Policy
- Local Lettings Plans/Covenants/Section 106 Agreements
- Asset Management and Development Strategies.

23. RESPONSIBILITY

Overall, responsibility for the delivery of the Allocations Policy lies with the Executive Director of Housing Care and Communities.

Development, review and implementation of this policy are the responsibility of the Assistant Director of Housing and Community Services.

24. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The policy will continue to be reviewed every three years. A policy may be reviewed earlier in the event of changes to the business plan, customer feedback, legislation, regulatory guidance, internal and external audit, risk assessment and current best practice.

APPENDIX A – FORTIS LIVING ALLOCATIONS POLICY FOR EXTRA CARE HOUSING SCHEMES

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the allocation and assessment process is to achieve and maintain a community of people who need housing with care and to ensure the apartments are let to those who are most likely to gain benefit from the scheme.

The apartments will be allocated on the basis of an applicant's needs as established through an assessment of housing, care and support needs.

Applicants should have housing and care or support needs. Applicants should possess a realistic potential to retain their independence within the community with the care and support available, but also need the security and peace of mind offered by the scheme.

CREATING A BALANCED AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Preference will be given to applicants who have the greatest housing, care and support needs. However, allocation decisions will also be based upon achieving a balanced community within the scheme. The key factors that will be considered when each vacancy arises are:

- applicants in greatest housing need (as the starting point)
- the care and support needs of the individual
- the overall mix of dependency in the scheme at that point in time

If those who have the greatest housing need don't have the necessary level of support requirements to make the scheme balanced, then preference will have to be given to those in less housing need who do have the most appropriate level of care requirement.

Therefore, it will be necessary to review the overall dependency needs of the scheme on a regular basis, including at the point each vacancy arises. This review will also need to include staffing resources to ensure they are sufficient to accommodate new residents.

The "balanced community" will be based on achieving a mix of care/support needs. This will be measured by working towards achieving a set proportion of a scheme's residents at any time with one of three distinct levels of housing support

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and care needs. A “balanced community” will be considered to be achieved by maintaining the following level of care and housing support needs of occupants at each scheme:

- 10 % of occupiers having high dependency needs (15+ hours of care)
- 40% having medium dependency needs (7–14 hours of care)
- 50% having low dependency needs (0–7 hours of care).

As the above implies, “needs/dependency” will include housing support needs (as determined by the housing support assessment) as well as care needs (as defined by a personal assessment.) This ensures that applicants who have low or no formal care needs but could have high support needs/levels of dependency but no requirement for a formal package of care can be considered.

Although it is recognised that the level of care required will not necessarily equate to the level of dependency, the level of care package or personal budget allocated to each individual will act as a guide.

ALLOCATIONS PANEL

Fortis Living Extra Care schemes will have their own Allocation Panel which will decide the eligibility of applicants. This will be chaired by Fortis Living and will include:

- Extra Care scheme Manager
- Representative from Fortis Allocations & Lettings team
- Representative from the County Council (e.g. Adults & Social Healthcare locality team)
- A non-voting representative from the Care and Support Provider

NOTE: The Care and Support Provider will be a member of the panel to contribute to and support decision making but will not have a vote.

As and when required the following may also be invited to attend panel meetings:

- A representative from a local NHS team or other appropriate experts usually invited to advise on an individual applicants’ needs and circumstances.

The Panel meetings will be convened monthly, but more frequently if required. Meetings will be convened and chaired by Fortis.

The panel will, in accordance with this policy, select suitable nominations for vacancies.

The Terms of Reference for the Allocations Panels are attached.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Summary of Eligibility Criteria

- 55 years of age or older.
- In housing need
- Have a care /support need

FULL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Due to the unique nature of extra care housing, it is necessary to provide specific details on eligibility:

Housing Need

As defined in Fortis Living Allocations policy and the Local Authority housing allocations policy –

Age

- Applicants must meet the minimum age criteria of 55 years or older.
- In the case of joint applications (spouse / partners), at least one of the applicants must meet the minimum age criteria of 55 years or older.
- Only in exceptional circumstances, will applicants below this age (or those over 55 with a younger dependent) be considered.

Needs/dependency (care/support)

A successful applicant...

- Will normally require assistance with their daily living tasks and/or their personal care. However, applicants may be quite independent, but would benefit from a safer and more supportive environment.
- Will currently be living in a situation that may no longer be suitable because of layout or where care and other facilities cannot readily, practically or economically be provided.
- May be a person for whom the setting of extra care housing will offer services which may not be available in the applicant's current home or not to the appropriate extent. For some, the key factors could mean the provision of more intensive, closer-to-hand care and/or support / continually supportive environment whereas for others it may be about helping to move towards a more independent lifestyle.
- May be vulnerable and at risk and a person for whom access to housing support/care would be invaluable, but whose current care package is small or non-existent. This may include those with anxiety, socially isolated, being abused or self-neglecting.

ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY

- Will have care and/or housing support needs because of frailty, long term illness or a range of physical difficulties or disabilities. This could include those whose needs may not be constant but would benefit from a supportive environment and access to support/care as and when needed e.g. those with Parkinson's disease, prone to falling.
- May similarly have a degenerative condition where an early move could prolong independent living and maintain/improve quality of life e.g. those with rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis.
- May have care / housing support needs because of dementia, mental health problems, and learning disabilities or exhibit some other cognitive impairment. Acceptance into the scheme will be dependent on the person's ability to cope with the independent living aspects of extra care housing and consideration will include: capacity to take on the responsibilities of a tenancy, ability to make relationships, ability to function within a daily routine, have some knowledge of their surroundings, and/or be in a supportive relationship within the scheme. It must also be anticipated that they will not cause risk or serious disruption to others.
- May be isolated or suffering from depression or some other long-term illness which is managed through appropriate treatment/ support and are likely to derive psychological benefits from the setting of extra care housing.
- May have informal carers who themselves would derive considerable relief and support from living in a supportive setting.
- Can be part of a couple. Couples are eligible to apply where one or both meet the above criteria.

Who is not eligible?

- Applicants who do not have care /housing support needs.
- Applicants who are subject to exclusion from either the Fortis Living Allocations Policy or the Local Authority's allocations schemes for reasons such as a history of serious rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, nuisance and disturbance or criminal activity or for reasons of individual or community safety.
- Applicants whose applications cannot be properly verified due to lack of sufficient information.
- Applicants whose level of physical or mental frailty exceeds that which can be reasonably met by the care provision within the scheme (or be predicted to develop within a short time of entry.)

ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY

- Applicants who require frequent nursing care beyond the level available from the Community Nursing Service.
- Applicants who have a requirement for specialist health services which cannot be met in a community setting.
- Applicants who have a level of physical or mental frailty which is likely to either lead to violent or severely challenging behaviour or would be a serious risk or disruption to others for example, people who persistently wander or are physically aggressive.
- Applicants who lack the capacity to take on the responsibilities of a tenancy / are not able to make an informed choice about extra care housing as their preferred option and are not felt able to settle in and manage in the scheme and its community.

MOVING ON

Whilst extra care housing aims to provide a home for life for those who live there, this is not a guarantee and the boundaries of the service must be fully explained to both applicants and their relatives or advocates as well as to other professionals.

The basis of the service is to be flexible and responsive to the increasing needs of the occupiers and thus enable ageing in place. However, if an occupier's needs change to the point that they cannot be met, by a combination of personal budget supports and community-based services, then Fortis will need to review the situation with the occupier and, if appropriate, their relatives. All Agencies will work closely together to seek a mutually acceptable solution.

ALLOCATION FRAMEWORK

All applications must be registered on Home Choice Plus, Hereford Homepoint, or the relevant Local Authority housing register. An initial banding will be given to reflect the applicants' housing needs on the local housing register.

Fortis Living will hold a central register of applications and applicants will be invited to complete a Fortis Extra Care Registration; this will include further information to build up a fuller picture about the applicants' circumstances, needs, risk issues, care and support requirements. The Scheme Manager will use this information to assess an applicant's need for extra care housing.

ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY

The Scheme Manager where appropriate will arrange for a Personal Assessment to be completed by the relevant County Council social services team. In effect, this means that full information is gathered, including all assessments of need for a shortlist of priority applicants.

All applications will be subject to all information being available to enable informed decisions to be made, the applicant meeting all the relevant criteria and having the appropriate level of dependency at the point of allocation.

A specialist assessment will be required in addition to a Personal Assessment for those with specialist need e.g. mental health, learning disability, dementia etc.

When an application is fully verified i.e. all information gathered, including assessments (or reassessments as the information needs to be up-to-date), the Scheme Manager will present these to the Allocation Panel.

The Panel will continuously review its “priority” list, taking into account any new eligible applicants since the last meeting, based on their banding. For those applications, the dependency needs will also be verified.

Alongside this, the Panel will also continuously review the overall need/dependency profile of the scheme so that it can provisionally identify what level of “need” is required when the next vacancy arises, to ensure a balanced scheme community is maintained and there are sufficient resources available.

APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

Fortis Living complaints policy and procedures will be used to manage any appeals or complaints about actions taken in connection with applications and allocations decisions.

EXTRA CARE HOUSING ALLOCATION PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PANEL?

- To jointly consider applications for housing at Fortis Living Extra Care Housing Schemes.
- To develop and maintain a balanced community within the scheme (balanced in the context of extra care housing.)
- To consider and allocate tenancies for vacancies at each scheme.

WHAT DOES THE PANEL DO?

The Panel will review all applications from people who request extra care housing to ensure the applicants meet the panel eligibility criteria and that reasonable preference is given to those with appropriate needs. This will include:

- Assess new applicants
- Review any existing applications previously accepted on the waiting list
- Review the order of priority of the applicants on the list according to their level of need for rented accommodation and support
- Allocate vacant apartments

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ALLOCATIONS PANEL

The Allocations Panel will consist of:

- 1 x Extra Care scheme Manager
- 1 x Representative from Fortis Allocations & Lettings team
- 1 x Representative from the relevant County Council social services team (e.g. DASH Locality Team)
- A representative from the current Care and Support Provider

Note: The Care and Support Provider will be a member of the panel to contribute to and support decision making but will not have a vote.

As and when required the following may also be invited, usually to contribute knowledge of an individual applicants' housing and/or care needs:-

- A representative from the local NHS team
- Additional experts with appropriate expertise regarding extra care housing clients.

MEETINGS

Subject to there being business to be considered the Allocations Panel will meet monthly and meetings will be convened and chaired by Fortis.

ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY

Fortis will aim to give Panel members not less than 5 working days' notice of a meeting unless the business to be considered is urgent.

There will be situations where prioritisation decisions are required between planned meetings. Some applicants may have urgent needs that cannot wait. Therefore some decisions will be taken as a result of email or phone communications as opposed to formal meetings.

The quorum will be one representative from Fortis Living and one from the relevant County Council.

The monthly meetings will agree a priority list of applicants who have been referred for the Extra Care scheme and relate this prioritisation to the allocation of tenancies for any vacancies.

The priority list will be maintained by the Fortis Living Allocations team.

PRIORITISATION OF APPLICATIONS

Applications will be considered by the panel in line with the allocation policy and the need to ensure there is a balanced community. It is anticipated that applications will come from one of the three routes below

- People who have an urgent need for re-housing because of their high care needs, and who would otherwise need residential care.
- People who have had a re-ablement assessment that indicates extra care would reduce on-going care needs.
- People with no care needs, who feel they would benefit from the extra care environment.

DECISION MAKING

It is expected the representatives will work collaboratively and seek to make decisions by consensus. However, in the event a decision cannot be reached by consensus Fortis reserves the right to make final decisions on allocating properties, having considered the assessment of whether extra care housing will be able to meet an applicant's needs and their suitability for the scheme as well as to its obligations to other residents.