
Lettings Policy – Hanover Retirement Housing

The purpose of this document is to set the Lettings Policy for allocating Hanover Retirement Housing properties which is fair, transparent and accountable. It determines who can apply for housing, the way their application is assessed, the priority order for offers of accommodation and the type of accommodation that may be offered.

Policy

Hanover is committed to ensuring that properties are allocated fairly, efficiently, without prejudice or discrimination to those who apply for retirement housing and who meet our lettings criteria.

This policy applies to Retirement Housing properties. Extra Care and some other estates have agreed local lettings policies which are applied in those local circumstances.

Aims

The aims of the Lettings Policy are to:

- House people who meet the qualifying criteria, reflecting priority needs where appropriate
- Ensure that properties are let with due regard to legal and regulatory obligations
- Ensure that properties are let quickly and efficiently
- Be non-discriminatory and promote equal opportunities and diversity in Hanover's housing
- Provide reasonable opportunities for existing residents to transfer to other Hanover properties

Commitment and Review

The Group Board looks to the support and professionalism of staff at all levels in making this policy truly effective. The effectiveness of this general statement of intent and other specific policies and procedures in use, will be regularly reviewed and revised as and when necessary.

Approved by the Board of Hanover Housing Association (the Group Board) on 26th November 2014

Lettings Policy - Introduction

Hanover is a national provider of retirement housing. We manage approximately 12,000 rented Retirement Housing properties throughout England.

This policy applies to the majority of Hanover's retirement housing properties that are available to rent. In some locations there are Local Lettings Plans (e.g. General Needs and Extra Care) where this national lettings policy does not apply or different criteria may apply.

Qualifying Criteria

The majority of Hanover's properties are designed and managed to reflect the needs of older people. We have 3 qualifying criteria which potential residents must meet to qualify for housing. This applies equally to Local Authority nominations and direct applicants.

- **Age criteria**

Anyone over 55 years can apply for Hanover's retirement housing properties. However, our normal policy is to offer housing to people of 60 years and over.

When there is no applicant of 60 years or over, Hanover will offer accommodation to people between 55 and 60 years by date order of their application.

In Hackney there is only one age limit of 55 years.

- **Ability to live independently**

We require that any potential resident is able to live independently, with any reasonable care and support as required. If an applicant does not have mental capacity, we will still offer suitable housing (where available) so long as they can be supported to maintain their tenancy. The tenancy agreement would need to be signed on the resident's behalf by their attorney (under power of attorney) or deputy (under court of protection). Please refer to Hanover's Mental Capacity policy.

- **Satisfactory housing and behaviour history**

In terms of rent or mortgage arrears, applicants and transfer applicants will only qualify for rehousing if:

- they have no net arrears, or
- if the total arrears are less than £500 and a repayment plan is in place and has been adhered to for at least 3 months
- no legal action has commenced

Other factors which will be taken into consideration are:

- a recent history of anti-social behaviour
- criminal convictions
- a history of possession proceedings against them

All such applicants and transfer applicants will have their application reviewed (in light of potential risks to Hanover, staff or our residents) and assessed before Hanover progresses or refuses the application.

Local Authority Nominations

On most estates, Hanover has agreements with the local authority or partnerships of local authorities to let a percentage of our vacant properties to people nominated by them. These nominated applicants could be forwarded either via direct contact with the local authority or from the authority's appointed Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme.

The cycle and ratio of Local Authority nominations to be housed on any estate is determined by the agreement between Hanover and the Local Authority. When it is a Local Authority Nomination to be housed, the Local Authority policy determines priority so long as the applicant meets Hanover's qualifying criteria as applied to all lettings.

Selling on Estates

On selected estates Hanover will market some vacancies for sale. Applicants can put themselves forward as potential buyers and their interest will be passed to the Estate Agent handling the sale. No priority status is given. The sale will proceed with the first person to agree an acceptable price who is in a position to purchase and meets the qualifying criteria within the lease for that property.

Waiting List Applications

Hanover maintains a waiting list for each estate and where it is not a Local Authority nomination, all lettings are made from the waiting list. There are two types of applicants who can apply for housing through a waiting list:

- Existing residents who wish to transfer to another property on their existing estate or on a different estate.
- New applicants, who apply directly to Hanover.

Hanover encourages waiting list applications for its retirement housing properties. Waiting lists contain both existing residents wishing to transfer and new applicants.

Applicants can register using the same application for a number of different estates. To ensure waiting lists are meaningful applicants will normally be restricted to applying for housing on no more than 5 Estates.

All waiting list applicants need to meet the qualifying criteria set out in this policy.

Applications are awarded priority into one of the 4 priority status groups. Within these priority categories, offers of tenancies are made in order of the date when the person's application is registered for the relevant estate.

Priority One: Existing residents

Top priority will be granted to existing residents who need to move because:

- They are at immediate risk of serious injury in their current accommodation
- They have lost their home either temporarily or permanently as a result of an incident such as a fire or flood.
- They are required to move because Hanover wishes to redevelop or dispose of their property.
- They have a need to move for other reasons, e.g. health, ability to manage stairs. Applicants must have clear rent accounts, no history of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and their application must be supported by their RHM.

All priority one applicants will need supporting documentation to evidence the reason for priority status being given. The Local Lettings Panel will decide the appropriate status and report outcomes to the Lettings Team.

In some other circumstances there maybe an urgent reason to grant a management move which must be supported by an Assistant Director or a member of the Strategic Management Team (SMT).

Priority Two: Sponsored Nominations

Hanover has sponsored nomination arrangements with a very small number of benevolent organisations who have in the past negotiated the right to a certain number of lettings annually. Where a sponsored nomination is exercised, it will take second priority. Any sponsored nominations need to meet the qualifying criteria.

The Lettings Team will record the decision to give second priority status. There is no requirement for a Local Lettings Panel to verify this decision.

Priority Three: External Applicants

Priority three applies when an external applicant has an exceptional health related need to move to more suitable accommodation, such as:

- The applicant has a life threatening illness which is being made significantly worse by their housing conditions
- The applicant cannot be discharged from hospital back to their existing property which is considered unsuitable (which may include being closer to support networks)

In each case the applicant will need to demonstrate how moving to a Hanover property will meet their specific needs. A health professional recommendation or assessment will be required to support the application. Their application will be considered by a Local Lettings Panel to determine whether the priority status will be given and to ensure the decision is recorded.

(Note: Local Authorities are responsible for emergency re-housing where some one is homeless which is why Hanover's lettings policy does not address this).

Priority Four: General Waiting list Applicants

All new applications (from external applicants and internal transfer applicants) will initially be included in priority four, unless awarded another priority status.

The applicant who has been waiting longest will be offered an available property before others on the list. Only if they refuse a property will those lower down the list be offered the same property.

Where an applicant decides to apply for another estate at a later date they will be registered for that estate at the time of their new application. Applicants can not carry over waiting times to alternative estates.

Local Lettings Panels

Any applicant requesting priority status will need to provide evidence as to why they should be awarded this priority. This evidence and the application will be reviewed by a Local Lettings Panel (managed within our five regions and chaired by Operations Managers or nominated deputy) to determine the priority status to be awarded. The Lettings Panel Chair will notify the Lettings Team of the decision and reasons for the decision so these can be communicated to the applicant and for audit purposes.

Waiting List Review

Hanover will review the status of waiting list applications regularly. If an applicant's circumstances change, Hanover reserves the right to review the priority status.

Removing applicants from a waiting list

There are a number of instances where an application will be removed from a waiting list.

- **Unreasonable Refusal of Offers**
If an applicant refuses three offers of suitable accommodation on the same estate, Hanover will remove the applicant from the waiting list.
- **Failure to meet the qualifying criteria**
Assessed on their own merit, Hanover retains the right to not register or to remove applicants on our waiting list if they do not meet the qualifying criteria or there are valid concerns which include: current rent or mortgage arrears (excluding technical Housing Benefit arrears), a history of anti-social behaviour, where individuals with a past criminal conviction may pose a risk (to staff or neighbours), or if they have abandoned a previous tenancy.

Any removal of an applicant from the waiting list has to be authorised by the responsible Housing Manager who will need to record the reasons and evidence for the decision. The record should be logged with the Lettings Team for audit purpose and to communicate onto the applicant.
- **Lack of response**
Hanover retains the right to remove any applicants who do not respond to regular waiting list reviews or to an invitation to view a property. Ordinarily, three non responses will trigger removal from the waiting list (subject to reasonableness e.g. a non response is valid when on holiday or in hospital).

If an applicant is not registered or removed from the waiting list due to the above circumstances, they are not precluded from making a fresh application in the future, where they can demonstrate the previous concerns are no longer valid.

Type of Properties

We try to let properties which match the size of households seeking re-housing and/or meet the health needs of residents.

This means that two bedroom properties will be offered first to those who have a proven medical or support need for a second bedroom or whose household is such that a second bedroom is required.

Hanover provides a range of one bedroom retirement properties of varying sizes. When allocating a one bedroom property Hanover will not distinguish between the various sizes and the applicant should assure themselves the property is suitable for their needs before accepting the tenancy. If a couple decide not to accept a one bedroom property because it is too small for two people to live in comfortably, this will be treated as a reasonable refusal.

Housing of current staff and closely connected persons*

Hanover may grant a tenancy of a dwelling to a person who is:

- (a) a current employee of the organisation, or
- (b) a closely connected person*,

provided that the following conditions are met.

1. the employee is not a member of the Executive Leadership Team, and
2. the rules of the association has been fully complied with, and

3. all relevant interests have been declared and dealt with in accordance with the organisation's Code of Conduct for Board members, staff and involved residents, and
4. the employee or closely connected person* has had no involvement in or influence over the process by which the tenancy allocated to the person in question, and
5. the tenancy was allocated on the same terms and in accordance with the same criteria as it would have been allocated in connection with any other beneficiary or potential beneficiary of the association, and
6. the employee is not housed on any estate where they have previously been employed during the previous 5 years.

Hanover reserves the opportunity to house a current employee of the organisation that does not meet the above criteria in exceptional circumstances following approval of the Executive Leadership Team.

*** Definition of a closely connected person:**

A 'closely connected person' includes people closely connected to a Board member or current employee as a result of being family members or having a close association. The Code of Conduct provides a fuller explanation of who should be identified as a closely connected person.

Re-housing of ex-Hanover Staff

Where staff have left the employment of Hanover and meet the qualifying criteria, they can apply for housing with Hanover.

Hanover will provide support for any retiring residential estate manager who will require housing. Ordinarily this will include supporting applications to other providers. In exceptional circumstances a retiring residential Estate Manager can be considered for priority one status to be approved by two members of Strategic Management Team.

It is recommended that ex-staff are not re-housed on any estate where they were previously employed - for a period of 5 years from the termination of their employment with Hanover. Ex-staff seeking priority status will have to meet the criteria for the award of priority status (as per any applicant).

Mutual Exchange

Hanover will facilitate mutual exchange of properties when requested by residents, subject to the incoming tenant meeting our qualifying criteria.

Right to Appeal

Applicants have the right to appeal any decision made by Hanover officers in relation to lettings. Appeals must be in writing to those outlined in the table below.

	1st Decision	Appeal
Refusal of offer of accommodation	Lettings Officer	Lettings Manager
Removal from waiting list <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent Arrears • Support/ASB/Ex Offenders 	Retirement Housing Manager	Operations Managers
Priority Three	Local Lettings Panel	Lettings Manager or Assistant Director
Priority One	Local Lettings panel	Assistant Director

Lettings Policy

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Version Control

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648.1	Original for viewing	Sue Dixon/Mark Jenkins	December 2011
648.2	Now effective	Sue Dixon	7 March 2012
648.3	Updated to reflect 'Selling on Estates' programme and changes to appeals arrangement	Sue Dixon	March 2013
648.4	Reviewed - Consistency of wording and changes to appeals arrangements	Sue Dixon	November 2013
648.5	Addition of information 'Housing of current staff and closely connected persons'	Sue Dixon	November 2014