



WILLOW TREE

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Allocations and Lettings Policy

Version:	V3
Responsibility for the Policy	Head of Housing and Customer Experience
Date approved by Executive	January 2024
Date approved by Board (if applicable)	Delegated
Date due for review:	January 2027

1. Statement of Intent

This policy sets out Willow Tree Housing Partnership's (WTHP) approach to allocating rented homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way to make the best use of our available housing, while assisting local authorities (LAs) with their housing duties.

2. Policy Objectives

- 2.1. We aim to ensure that:
- New residents are selected fairly and in line with legislation and policy
 - We work in partnership with the LAs in whose areas we operate to enable them to meet their legal obligations
 - Through the effective allocation of our homes, we enable sustainable tenancies and cohesive communities.
- 2.2. Potential applicants are identified or referred to WTHP through a variety of mechanisms which include:
- Local authority Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes including Devon Home Choice and Homefinder Somerset
 - Mutual exchange
 - Direct lets
 - Direct application (in the case of Rentplus properties only with the agreement of the LA)

3. Direct lets

- 3.1. Within the terms of the CBL partnership agreements, a small number of homes may be let directly to a customer who meets specific criteria, in consultation with the LA, rather than being advertised.
- 3.2. Examples where a direct let may be agreed include:
- Where an existing tenant needs to move to make the best use of the home, for example where they are over or under occupying a home, and no suitable alternative home is available.
 - Where an allocation is required to ensure protection of the public, for example, following a decision made by a Multi-Agency Public Protection panel, or where a customer has been referred as part of the witness protection scheme.
 - Where an existing tenant needs to move due to imminent risk to health or safety.
 - Where a sensitive let is required for a particular home, because of issues such as anti-social behaviour in the area.
 - Where a tenant is occupying a disabled adapted property and no longer requires the adaptations.
 - Where a tenant's property is being repaired and they need to be

moved on a temporary or permanent basis.

- Where there is development or re-development, disposal, demolition or refurbishment of properties planned, and a household is being displaced by this and requires suitable alternative accommodation.

3.3. We will maintain a list of tenants who require a move to another home to improve their financial circumstances or make more efficient use of our housing stock. Tenants being considered for a direct let will be expected to be registered on the relevant CBL scheme and actively bidding on any other suitable homes that become available.

3.4. Direct lets will only be made, with the support of the LA and the approval of the Housing Service Operations Lead, on the basis of a suitable home becoming available. Information on all direct lets offered will be shared through the CBL feedback process.

4. Eligibility

4.1. Unless an empty home is required for a direct let, it will be advertised on the relevant CBL system. Once the advertising period has closed, we will shortlist the applicants. The applicant who has been in the highest housing needs band for the longest will be at the top of the shortlist and will therefore generally be considered first.

4.2. In assessing an applicant's eligibility, the following criteria will be considered where applicable:

- Local area connection criteria – where there is a planning restriction on the property under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, applicants may have to fulfil certain criteria specific to a scheme, such as living or working in the local area. This will be included on the CBL advert.
- Any local lettings policy criteria put in place by WTHP and approved by the LA, to promote stable communities and sustainable tenancies.
- Property and household size – we will allocate properties to households in line with Local Housing Allowance (LHA) regulations which allow a bedroom each for:
 - Every adult couple
 - Any other adult aged 16 or over
 - Any two children (under 16) of the same sex
 - Any two children, regardless of sex, under 10
 - Any other child under 16
 - A non-resident carer (where the applicant/partner or child have disability and need overnight care)

- In certain circumstances, such as where a home is hard to let, or in housing designated for older people, under occupation may be agreed by the Housing Service Operations Lead. These cases will be considered on an individual basis and taking into account the affordability of the home to the prospective tenant.
- Priority for bungalows will be given to applicants over 55 years old or with an assessed need for ground floor accommodation. This will be reflected in the advert.
- Specially adapted homes will be advertised as such and in shortlisting, the needs of the individual applicants will be considered to ensure the best use of the homes.
- An affordability assessment will be carried out to ensure that the rent and other associated regular bills are within the means of the applicant and the tenancy is sustainable.
- Applicants with a support need, including where there is a history of drug or alcohol misuse, will only be considered where they have appropriate support in place with which they are engaging.

4.3. We will not restrict the allocation of housing to any specific group or groups of applicants. Applications, via the appropriate CBL system, will be accepted except where they meet one or more of the published Grounds for Refusal of Housing.

5. Joint tenancies

- 5.1. Joint tenancies will be granted to married couples, civil partners and couples living in a relationship where both applicants are eligible for social housing. In cases where only one applicant is eligible, a sole tenancy will be offered.
- 5.2. Applicants whose situations are outside of these circumstances, including intergenerational tenancies (for example between a parent and adult child) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, and will require the approval of the Housing Service Operations Lead.

6. Housing of under 18s

- 6.1. Applicants under the age of 16, and for Rentplus properties under 18 will not be considered under any circumstances.
- 6.2. Applicants who are 16 or 17 (minors) are unable to hold an Assured tenancy. Instead, minors will be offered an Equitable Tenancy with a guarantor. This could be a member of the applicant's family, Social Services or another support agency. Where there is no one to act as guarantor, the Operations Director will decide if it is appropriate to offer a tenancy to the applicant. On

turning 18, a new Assured tenancy will be offered.

- 6.3. Before a tenancy is offered to a minor, a full assessment will be carried out to ensure that the tenancy can be successfully maintained. Normally this will be done in conjunction with a support worker.

7. Hard to let homes

- 7.1. Where a home has proved to be hard to let, for example due to size, location or design, we will consider adopting different strategies to re-let them. This might include advertising in the local press or using a third-party agency, such as Rightmove. All decisions to adopt a different strategy for letting hard to let homes will be approved by the Housing Service Operations Lead with the agreement of the relevant LA.

8. Applications by Board Members or employees and their close relatives

- 8.1 Where an application for social housing or shared ownership is made by a WTHP employee, Board Member, or close relative this must be declared to the HSOL

- 8.2 Board approval should be sought to be allocated following the provisions of this policy to ensure full transparency and accountability. This is the case of any social/affordable housing, Rent plus home or Shared Ownership property.

- 8.3 Details of the application and Board approval should be held on the property file of the tenancy along with associated tenancy agreements. This should be stored in document storage system.

9. Appeals

- 9.1. If an applicant is dissatisfied with a decision made by WTHP regarding their housing application, they can request a review by the Housing Service Operations Lead within 7 days of the decision. It may not be possible to hold the home empty while the review is considered. Any subsequent complaint should be made in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.

10 Performance Standards

Performance on allocations will be monitored monthly by the Executive Team and reported to the Board quarterly.

11 Reference Documents

External

- The Housing Act 1996
- Regulator of Social Housing Tenancy Standard
- The Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Section 106 - Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Internal

- Void Management Procedure
- Allocations and Letting Procedure
- Grounds for Refusing Housing Procedure
- Decant Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Complaints Procedure

When setting policy, WTHP will ensure a golden thread of best practice runs through all aspects of our operations in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion. We will seek to minimise adverse environmental impacts arising as a consequence of our work. This approach and all policies will be reviewed on their anniversary date or as new guidance or legislation is introduced, whichever occurs sooner.