



LETTINGS POLICY

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1. Policy Context

LJHA has accommodation suitable for both general needs tenants and for people with support needs. This policy sets out how Leeds Jewish Housing Association (LJHA) allocates and re-lets properties to both new and existing customers. It ensures that we are letting our properties fairly and efficiently, and that we are using our stock effectively to meet housing need. The policy aligns with our aim “to provide good quality and affordable homes in Leeds, primarily for the Jewish community”.

This relates to homes let on social rent tenancies.

2. Definitions

The lettings system describes the range of processes used by LJHA through which an individual or a household can access a property, and also how that household can move on to other accommodation if their housing requirements change.

Nominations Agreement

A nominations agreement is where a housing association and a local authority work in partnership to address housing need within the local area. The housing association accepts an agreed percentage of applicants from their local authority rehousing list when properties become vacant.

Direct Lettings

These are properties which are advertised and re-let directly by the housing association on the principle of a first come, first served basis, whilst demonstrating a need for housing set out in the eligibility criteria.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 Equal Opportunities Statement

The Association has a separate Equal Opportunities Policy, and is committed to ensuring equal opportunities across all activities. In relation to the lettings policy, the aim of the Association is to maximise access to the housing list to all people regardless of age, disability, race, religion, sex, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.

3.2 Confidentiality Statement

All applications for housing accommodation will be dealt with in a confidential manner. Information held under the scheme will not be disclosed to any third party, except where:

- The individual who is the subject of such confidential information has consented to disclosure to a third party;

- LJHA is permitted to disclose the information under GDPR;
- There is a requirement in law to make such disclosures;
- LJHA considers that the applicant has given consent for any information held on an application to be shared with other social housing landlords.

4. Implementation

4.1 Access to the housing register/eligibility

To be eligible for a LJHA tenancy, an applicant must:

- Be over 18 years of age, or, in exceptional circumstances, over 16 and with an adult trustee approved by Leeds Jewish Housing Association holding the legal tenancy on behalf of the young person until they reach the age of 18;
- Be a permanent resident of the UK;
- Not be exempt from holding a tenancy by their immigration status;
- Be nominated by a local authority under the terms of their Housing Allocation Policy, OR;
- Be assessed by us as in housing need, OR;
- Be a tenant who by moving makes a home available to someone who is in housing need.

4.2 Provision of Information and Advice

Anyone who is considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant will be informed of this decision. They will also be advised what they need to do to become eligible for housing in the future. They may be referred to another agency for support or advice if necessary and signposted to other housing options and relevant sources of information.

4.3 How Applicants can make an Application / Register

There are a number of ways in which people can apply for a property or register on LJHA's housing register:

- Via Abrisitas™, the Leeds Common Housing Register, which is used to create shortlists of applicants interested in homes in particular areas;
- The LJHA waiting list (that applicants can apply to directly or that may be populated through nominations from local authorities and other sources);
- Through mutual exchanges and other local or national mobility schemes;
- Through the promotion and facilitation of home ownership where appropriate, for instance through shared ownership schemes.

4.4 Excluding Applicants

LJHA can reject an application at any stage:

- If the applicant has failed to provide the evidence required under the lettings policy eligibility criteria or has not followed processes;
- Where the property would be unaffordable;
- Where the applicant requests a property in a location that LJHA has no properties in or features that our properties do not have;
- Where the applicant has not complied with the time limits and actions set out in the procedure;
- Where the property would otherwise be under occupied or overcrowded or
- The applicant otherwise fails to qualify under the lettings policy.

An applicant or a member of their household must not:

- Have been convicted of a criminal offences (such as child-related offences), or have an injunction for anti-social behaviour, or other unacceptable behaviour including a history of causing serious nuisance or annoyance to neighbours within the past five years;
- Have a conviction or injunction for using accommodation or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes such as drug dealing;
- Have current or former tenant arrears with LJHA or any other landlord;
- Own or have a legal interest in any residential property in the UK, unless it is a home which is not suitable or where there is insufficient equity in the property to afford a suitable home;
- Already hold a social or affordable tenancy elsewhere, unless this will be relinquished as part of being rehoused.

4.5 Choice and Preferences

Whether, and how quickly, LJHA is able to house applicants in their preferred choice will depend on the size and type of property required, and the location.

4.6 Prioritising Applicants

LJHA's prime purpose is to help people who are in housing need that they cannot meet in the private market. We will however carry out an affordability check on all applicants and transfers. LJHA uses a points system, which measures relative need. Points will be awarded for criteria including:

- Security of tenure;
- Property size and suitability;
- Property condition;
- Access to amenities;
- Health and mobility considerations;

- Other housing requirements.

Applicants awarded Priority Extra by Leeds City Council may take precedence over other applicants in the allocation process when suitable property becomes available.

4.7 Medical Factors

Where a priority has been awarded for a specific type of property, or a property with particular facility, then only properties meeting that requirement will be offered.

4.8 Adapted Properties

Wherever possible, only those households requiring the facilities will be offered adapted properties. Options include:

- Direct letting to transfer applicants;
- Direct letting to applicants on the Leeds city council housing register;
- Referrals from relevant organisations.

4.9 Accommodation Designated and Designed for Older People

Sheltered accommodation will be let primarily to applicants aged 60 years old and over. Applicants under 60 years old will only be considered for sheltered accommodation if medical support is available for their application and an assessment of the need for a Supported service has been completed.

It is recognised that general demand for specific schemes may change over time and LJHA they reappraise the designation of schemes for parts of schemes if necessary, in consultation with residents and other parties.

4.10 Allocation of Bedrooms

Due to welfare reform changes and reduction in benefits, LJHA aims to provide a bedroom for each member of the household requiring one i.e. one bedroom per couple, and one for every other person living in the household. The minimum standards will be:

- One bedroom per couple (unless there is a medical reason for requiring two);
- One bedroom for two children of different sex where both are under 10 years old;
- One bedroom for two children of the same sex up to the age of 16 years old, unless there is agreement for them to share after that age;
- Not more than two people sharing any bedroom;

- Bedroom provision will be made for an unborn child.

Circumstances may arise where additional rooms are required, for example:

- Where an applicant requires a carer to live with them or equipment or adaptations which require more space; or, where medical reports indicate that room for a carer or equipment will be needed in the future;
- Where an applicant or existing tenant has children who stay with them on a regular basis (as a result of either a court order or an informal arrangement), the Association will consider the size of accommodation that is appropriate to either parent or guardian depending upon the situation.

LJHA encourages all those living in a home that is larger than they need to consider downsizing to free up much-needed family homes and may offer incentives.

Under occupiers of working age in receipt of benefits may find it difficult to keep up with rent payments due to changes in welfare reform and reduction in housing benefit payments, so LJHA will encourage may offer incentives to affected households to review their options with us.

4.11 Joint Working

LJHA works with Leeds City Council to offer choice to customers through nominations and shared communication through Leeds City Councils' Abris system to assist with lettings.

4.12 Mobility Options

LJHA will provide information for applicants about all mobility options in which they are interested. Staff will be trained to give advice and information to applicants on the mobility options available. Staff will also assist applicants with the completion of application forms as appropriate.

Where tenants propose to swap properties in a mutual exchange, LJHA will request that they discuss affordability so advice can be provided prior to the exchange taking place. LJHA wants to avoid tenants putting themselves into a position where they cannot afford the rent, and risking their tenancies. There is no statutory right to exchange, and any right to exchange will be contractual based on the rights set out in the tenancy agreement.

LJHA will consider requests from our existing tenants for rehousing if the tenant has a housing need which we are realistically able to meet. Applications for transfers will only be considered if the applicant has been a tenant in their current property for at least 12 months. This time

limit may be waived in exceptional circumstances (e.g. racial harassment or fleeing violence etc), although additional written documentation will be needed to support the request (e.g. from a Social Worker, Police etc). The decision to consider a transfer in such circumstances will be made by the Director of Operations.

All transfer requests will be processed in accordance with this Lettings Policy. The transfer application will not be considered until all relevant enquiries have been carried out and all supporting information has been received.

4.13 Rehousing of Staff, Contractors, Board Members and Relatives

Housing applications made by members of staff, board members, and contractors employed currently or in the previous 12 months, and some members of their close families, will only be considered in certain circumstances and consideration of such applications will be open fair and transparent.

Such applicants will only be housed in accordance with the published lettings policy and will receive equal treatment to all other applicants in the allocation of housing. This includes transfers.

Any decision to allocate properties, re-house or transfer employees and/or their close relatives will be notified to the board and the interest of the relevant person must be disclosed. Staff of relatives applying will not be involved in the application / lettings process.

4.14 Review of List / Register

A review of the waiting list will occur every 6 months.

4.15 Local Lettings Schemes / Property Criteria

In order to achieve sustainable communities, LJHA may use local lettings initiatives or set property criteria. Examples of local lettings initiatives might be:

- Seeking a higher percentage of working families to help to promote a mixture of household types within an area or;
- Seeking a high number of local authority nominations in order that the existing community feel “ownership” of a new development.

Examples of property criteria might be:

- No or restricted numbers of children to balance child density or because of the nature of the property (e.g. upper floor flat);

- Age, disability or support needs for certain properties.

4.16 Offers, Viewings Rejections and Refusals

If an applicant decides not to accept an offered property (either after a viewing, or because they decide not to view) this is a refusal. LJHA needs to understand why properties are refused both to help us to meet that applicant's needs better, and to help us to make sure our properties meet what people are looking for. If an applicant refuses two offers we may contact them to discuss their options, as it may be that LJHA cannot provide what they are looking for and therefore under these circumstances may be removed from the waiting list.

4.17 Lettings Standard

This is available on request from LJHA.

4.18 Appeals and Review Mechanisms

LJHA will consider appeals against our decisions, especially any decisions to:

- Exclude from the waiting list;
- Place an application in a lower priority level;
- Refuse to offer accommodation on affordability grounds;
- Suspend an application.

Applicants who want to ask us to review a decision must contact us in writing within 28 days of the decision, with their reasons. We will ask another officer to check the original decision, and to respond within 10 working days of receiving the request. Should applicants be unhappy with this outcome, they should refer to LJHA's Complaints Policy (available online or upon request) which may involve investigation as appropriate by the Housing Manager, Director of Operations, and / or Chief Executive.

4.19 Performance Monitoring and Review

LJHA will monitor:

- Lettings to BME households against target;
- Lettings profiles for all lettings e.g. age group, household composition;
- % of lettings made to transfer applicants against the maximum target;
- Void rent loss;
- Average re-let time split into time in repair and time in letting;
- Reasons for leaving, refusing offers and for rehousing;

- Annual exclusions (household composition, ethnic origin and reason);
- Allocations to nominable groups against the target;
- Satisfaction with the quality of the lettings service.

LJHA will ask applicants and tenants to give us feedback on a regular basis, and use this to inform any future reviews of policy. LJHA has considered equalities issues in developing this policy, and we believe that it gives fair access to housing to people from disadvantaged groups, whilst seeking to create healthy, vibrant communities.

We will monitor the impact of the policy on our communities, and will also check that it is not leading to an unfair disadvantage for any particular groups of people.