

ARHAG HOUSING ASSOCIATION

ALLOCATIONS & REFERRALS

POLICY

DEPARTMENTS AFFECTED

- Housing Management
- Asset Management
- Finance

OBJECTIVES

- To let homes to those in the greatest housing need in a fair and non-discriminatory way
- To make the best use of the available housing stock
- To contribute to the achievement of sustainable communities
- To avoid creating tenancies which are unsustainable
- To make clear the criteria according to which properties are let
- To ensure properties are let without delay to avoid rent loss
- To assist the homeless population to access temporary accommodation

POLICY STATEMENT

ARHAG Housing Association is a charitable, non-profit making organisation. Its purpose is to provide accommodation for people in housing need who are unable to secure accommodation from other sources.

ARHAG has limited housing resources and the majority of its lettings are as a result of local authority nominations. The Association does not have a waiting list except for specific schemes such as hostels or where demand is so low that a Local Lettings Policy applies.

The Association has separate targets for nominations, homeless persons, transfers, referrals and mobility cases. The Association accepts a small number of referrals each year from a limited number of agencies.

Allocations Panels have been set up and procedures have been developed which aim to ensure fairness in the selection, allocation and referral process, regardless of a persons' race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability or vulnerability in society. Under certain limited circumstances the Association will exclude applicants from housing.

The Association also provides temporary accommodation for the homeless population via hostels.

In all allocations of properties ARHAG will seek to be sensitive to the needs of the prospective tenant and resident in terms of allocation and equally sensitive to the needs of existing tenants.

ARHAG will seek to create an environment where people wish to live and assist in establishing sustainable tenancies by means of housing management support and assistance.

ARHAG will also be mindful of its aims of achieving sustainable communities and social cohesion either via the referrals process or by means of support in terms of community facilities and initiatives. Each scheme offering permanent accommodation therefore has a

profile target to ensure a balance is maintained within the community. Each homeless centre similarly seeks to create a balanced community giving priority to those with a particular need for accommodation on medical or welfare grounds.

In the case of permanent housing, The Association does not operate any form of bar in respect of residential qualifications (unless applicants earn enough to purchase their own home in areas of high demand), or insist upon any income requirements, or disbar people if they are reliant upon housing benefit.

ARHAG does however, request references from tenants and where possible, in areas of low demand and where there are problems of anti-social behaviour, the Association will also link in with the local authority's anti-social behaviour procedures and seek reports from the Police, Probation Service, Local Authority or Social Services for additional information which may affect the allocation of a property.

Information regarding a nominee's previous tenancy, any history of anti-social behaviour, rent arrears or other debt to a landlord, Housing Benefit fraud, vulnerability or violence will be regarded as relevant to the assessment of an allocation in respect of the nominee.

ARHAG will in prioritising nominees and referrals give preference to those in the greatest housing need as detailed in the points system except where this would lead to unsustainable tenancies or unstable communities based upon the existing tenant profile.

Nominations

ARHAG will allocate at least 75% of its property to nominations from local authorities. The Association consults with local authorities on a regular basis and seeks to maximise its contribution to the provision of housing for local people.

ARHAG's lettings plan has regularly recorded our success in assisting local authorities in respect of nominations and the housing of homeless persons.

Property Size Matching

In terms of the number of bedrooms required the following criteria apply:

A bedroom is necessary for:

- A cohabitating couple
- A parent in a single parent family
- Each adult over 18 years of age
- Children over 10 years old and of different sexes
- Where more than two children of whatever age or sex are sharing a room

In areas of low demand consideration will be given to granting an extra bedroom where the parent has regular overnight stays for a child with whom he/she is separated. A copy of the Court Order or a letter of confirmation from the parent holding residency is required.

Temporary Accommodation

The Association accepts nominations from Local Authorities for temporary accommodation for homeless families, accepted under the terms of the Housing Act 1996. These families must be living in accommodation which lacks security of tenure and the Local Authority must agree to re-house them on a permanent basis within the period allowed for letting.

Vulnerable Tenants

ARHAG provides homes for vulnerable tenants, such as the people with mental health problems, and people with learning disabilities, and refugees. Housing is provided in both general and temporary housing.

Any special needs are taken into account at the lettings stage and wherever possible ARHAG will seek to provide the necessary support for an applicant to sustain a tenancy.

Staff will liaise with families and friends, statutory and voluntary agencies to enlist the appropriate care and support for the tenant.

When dealing with breaches of tenancy the Association will liaise with agencies and carers involved prior to making any decisions on action to be taken.

Transfers and Exchanges

A tenant will be allowed to move subject to:

- A clear rent account
- No outstanding rechargeable repairs
- No breaches of tenancy
- No unapproved alterations to the property
- No legal proceeding against the tenant (or the incoming tenant in the case of an exchange)

ARHAG tries to assist tenants who need to move to an area where the Association does not have accommodation suitable for their needs. This can be done by:

- **Exchange:** a current tenant swaps properties with another tenant who must be either an existing ARHAG tenant, a tenant of another RSL or a local authority tenant. An exchange is a form of assignment of a tenancy which requires the landlord's permission to take place. This permission can be withheld under certain circumstances (see 'Grounds for Withholding Consent to Assignment by Way of Exchange' in the Housing Act 1985)
- **Choice Based Lettings:** sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL) schemes that offer new and existing social housing tenants greater mobility, choice and flexibility over their housing.

Exclusions

Wherever possible, ARHAG will seek to provide the necessary support for an applicant to sustain a tenancy.

In some circumstances the Association may find it appropriate to exclude a person from the application process.

- If there is evidence that the applicant breached terms of a tenancy for which there are statutory grounds for possession, or breached the terms of a mortgage, or committed acts of physical violence against staff or other residents, as long as, the events have taken place within 2 years of the application
- Exclusion on these grounds will not be used as a 'blanket ban' against all such people but will only be considered alongside each applicant's relative housing need
- If the applicant will be unable to meet the conditions of the occupancy agreement without additional support and the support needed is of a type or level which the ARHAG cannot provide.
- If the housing on offer incorporates specifically adapted facilities or support services targeted at people whose particular needs, and the applicant's household does not have those needs, or needs support at such a level that the Association could not meet them without seriously undermining its ability to provide for the current residents of the scheme, or does not have the resources itself, or through social services or health authority sponsorship, to meet any personal charges for these special features or services.

- ARHAG is obliged to provide reasonable assistance to the local authority in providing lettings for sex offenders and other offenders. ARHAG will, where available, participate in the establishment of protocols for the letting of properties to sex offenders. ARHAG will not institute a blanket ban upon sex offenders although it will be particularly mindful of its obligation to be sensitive to the needs and protection of existing residents and their families.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Tenants' Handbook
- Diversity Policy
- Low Demand/Difficult to Let Policy
- Development Procedures
- Maintenance Procedures

RESPONSIBILITY

- Tenancy Services Officer
- Hostel Worker
- Head of Housing

RISK ASSESSMENT

The use of a limited stock of housing must be seen to be fair and efficient.

The letting of properties must not be discriminatory. The Association must meet its obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and should follow the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in letting homes.