

# Lettings Policy

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<b>Associated procedure</b>	Lettings Procedure, Starter tenancy Procedure, Pre-tenancy Procedure, Direct Let Procedure

# Introduction

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This Policy outlines Connexus' approach to the letting of homes for social and affordable rent. Shared ownership properties will be let in line with our Affordable Home Ownership Policy and market rent properties will be let and managed via regularly reviewed contracts with local Estate Agents.
- 1.2 We will consider the individual circumstances, housing needs and aspirations of customers in order to match them to the right home at the right time and make the best use of available homes.
- 1.3 We will offer clear and relevant housing options advice and support customer mobility by providing opportunities to exchange their homes.
- 1.4 We will contribute to each local authorities strategic housing functions and support them with their duties to meet identified local housing needs.
- 1.5 We will work efficiently to minimise the amount of time its homes are empty.

## 2. Problem to Solve

### **Legal and Regulatory Requirements**

- 2.1 Connexus needs to act in an open and transparent way and to ensure that there is no cause for anyone to challenge the way it operates and its standards of probity and fairness.
- 2.2 We will ensure that this Policy meets the requirements within the following relevant legislation:
  - Housing Acts 1988 and 1996
  - Homelessness Act 2002
  - Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
  - Equality Act 2010
  - Data Protection Act 2018
  - Human Rights Act 1998
  - The Localism Act 2011
  - The Welfare Reform Act 2012
  - Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
  - Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- 2.3 The Policy will also meet the required outcomes of the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard.

## 3. Method/s

### How we find our customers

3.1 Connexus will find new customers by:

- Advertising our homes on Choice Based Letting Scheme websites along with other registered social housing providers.
- Marketing some of our homes on external property advertising websites as well as on our own website and social media pages.
- Working with our Local Authority partners who may nominate a new customer to us direct for an empty home.
- Following specific referral arrangements with various external agencies for some of our supported and specialist client group housing.

### Direct Let

3.2 In some exceptional circumstances we may withhold certain empty properties. This will allow us to house customers without regard to housing need but will only be done with the approval of the Lettings Team Leader. Some of the reasons for considering a direct let include:

- Enabling move-on from our supported accommodation.
- Following a succession where there is under-occupation.
- Decants whilst major works are being carried out.
- If aids and adaptations have been refused or the property cannot be adapted.
- When family members are left in a property following the death of the resident with no right of succession.
- Safeguarding concerns.

### Making the best use of homes

3.3 To make the best use of our homes Connexus may:

- Agree local lettings plans with our partners for some of our homes. These may give preference to particular customer groups depending on the needs of that locality and are regularly reviewed.
- Match homes in accordance with any Section 106 agreement that we have with our partners, ensuring that local connections are checked and verified if needed.
- Have bespoke lettings criteria for each of our Supported Housing and Independent Living schemes.
- Carry out additional checks and face to face interviews if we decide that a sensitive let is needed due to the following:
  - the previous customer was evicted due to anti-social behaviour,
  - there was proven anti-social behaviour that would have resulted in eviction had they not left of their own accord,
  - there was proven poor conduct of tenancy due to Domestic Abuse.
  - the previous customer was taken advantage of due to vulnerability.
  - a general needs vacancy has arisen within an independent living scheme.

- Aim to make use of bungalows or adapted homes by giving preference to customers / households whose health/mobility will benefit from these.
- Be able to assist under occupied households by offering to financially support a move to smaller accommodation.
- We will consider the number of bedrooms each household needs and will generally follow the size criteria set out in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which allows one bedroom for a:
  - Single adult or one couple, aged 16 or over.
  - Two children under 16 of the same gender.
  - One or two children under the age of 10.
  - Non-resident overnight carer.
  - Member of the household who requires their own bedroom due to medical need.

3.4 Customers may be able to apply for properties that give them one bedroom more than they need and under-occupying will be permitted if we are happy that the tenancy can be sustained. Preference will always be given in the first instance to households who will not under-occupy the available property.

3.5 We will promote mutual exchange schemes for our existing customers.

### **Sustainability**

3.6 We want to get our relationship with our customers off to the best start and will work to make sure that the offer of a home is the right step for the customer. This involves getting to know our customer and ensuring that they are ready to move; including being able to make a rent payment in advance.

3.7 To do this, we will ask customers to:

- Complete an income and expenditure assessment.
- Discuss the results of a credit check.
- Provide proof of identity.
- Provide references or contact details from previous landlords or agencies that they are working with.

3.8 We will offer assistance to customers who have difficulty with any of the above due to support needs, language barriers or lack of ID. This will include signposting to relevant agencies if further support and guidance may be needed to maintain and sustain the tenancy.

### **Deciding not to offer a home to a customer**

3.9 We will consider every customer's individual circumstance before making any decisions; each one will be based on its own merits. However, if we decide not to offer a home to a customer we will explain our reasons clearly, as well as what the customer needs to do in order to be re-considered in future, we will also confirm our decision in writing if needed.

3.10 The list below is not exhaustive and merely provides some examples of what we consider when making our decision to offer:

- **Having enough money:** Both new and existing customers will be required to demonstrate that the tenancy will be sustainable and that they can afford to pay the rent and service charges and have enough money left to live on. We have a framework with income thresholds to use when deciding if a customer has enough income to live on after paying their rent and service charges. This will be based on the amounts that we deem each household to need as a minimum net weekly disposable income after housing costs have been deducted.
  - **Anti-Social or Unacceptable Behaviour:** We will not usually offer a home to customers or members of their households who have a history of anti-social or unacceptable behaviour. However, in order to keep the number of refusals to a minimum, all relevant circumstances will be considered and we will examine the strength of the evidence against the customer and his or her household when making our decision.
- 3.11 We are unlikely to offer a customer a home due to anti-social behaviour if (but not limited to):
- the anti-social behaviour occurred in the last 5 years and the nature of the alleged anti-social behaviour is likely to have an impact on our community.
  - there have been convictions as a consequence of the anti-social behaviour.
  - the anti-social behaviour breached tenancy conditions and caused the customer or any member of his or her household to be evicted.
  - the customer or a household member has been verbally or physically abusive towards any Connexus colleague or any other person.
- 3.12 We are unlikely to offer a customer a home if they (but not limited to):
- owe over £1000 of rent, mortgage or other housing debts and;
  - have a history of making sporadic or late payments to their landlord.
  - have failed to make or stick to an agreed payment plan.
  - have recently cleared arrears or housing debt in order to be considered for another home.
  - have been evicted for rent arrears on a previous tenancy, in the last 5 years.
  - have obtained or attempted to obtain a tenancy by deception, for example, by withholding information or by giving false or misleading information.
- 3.13 **Re-housing violent and sexual offenders:** We will work with relevant agencies to make a full assessment and carefully consider any risks before making a decision to offer a home to a violent or sexual offender.
- 3.14 **Existing customers wishing to transfer:** We will offer all our customers wishing to move housing advice including how to access housing and mobility schemes.
- 3.15 **Immigration status:** We will ensure every adult over 18 has the legal right to rent our home, if a customer does not have the legal right we will offer them advice.
- 3.16 **Homeowners:** We will consider existing homeowners where the property that they own is going through a sale. Homeowners will also be subject to any assessments that are needed to comply with the local authority's allocation schemes in order to make sure that their need cannot be met via the open market.

- 3.17 **High income/savings/assets:** we will not normally offer accommodation where there is evidence that a customer has sufficient financial means to meet their housing need. We will apply the limits set by the relevant local authority when assessing those customers that apply directly to us.
- 3.18 **Availability of appropriate support:** We will only offer a home to vulnerable customers where adequate support arrangements are in place. We will work with agencies to seek the required support before making the final decision. We will not offer a home where the customer refuses to or has demonstrated that they are unlikely to engage with any support that is put in place.
- 3.19 **Minors (under 18 years old):** Anyone under 18 cannot legally hold a tenancy. We will consider offering accommodation to under 18s if the tenancy is held in trust by a family member or recognised agency, and relevant support is in place.
- 3.20 **Housing Employees:** The Granting of Benefits– Accommodation Policy will be adhered to when an existing employee is considered for a property.

### **Appeals**

- 3.21 Customers can appeal against our decision not to offer them a home, if they feel we have not taken into account all relevant information or have made the decision unfairly.
- 3.22 Appeals must be made within 5 working days from the date the customer is informed of the decision not to offer. We will not hold any homes empty whilst the appeal is being considered. However, if the appeal is successful, we will seek to offer a suitable alternative property.
- 3.23 An independent Manager who was not involved in the original decision will review the appeal. Customers will be notified of the outcome in writing within 15 working days or within a mutually agreed timescale.

## **4. Measurement**

- 4.1 We will monitor our lettings to ensure they reflect the community we serve and do not adversely impact any specific groups in the community.
- 4.2 There will be a number of measures in place to monitor the overall performance of the lettings service which will include regular reporting on:
- Average relet time
  - Customer satisfaction
  - Void rent loss
  - Tenancies failed within first year
  - Number and reasons for evictions