



Lettings Policy

October 2022

Lead Officer: Jane Crookes, Lettings Manager

<u>Version No.</u>	<u>Purpose/Changes</u>	<u>Approval Date</u>	<u>Approved By</u>	<u>Suggested Review Date</u>
<u>V8.0</u>	<u>Health Check</u>	<u>13/10/2022</u>	<u>HoST</u>	<u>October 2025</u>
V7.0	Full Review	19/07/2021	Community Voice	October 2022
V6.0	Full Review	10/09/2018	Community Voice	September 2019

Contents

		Page
1.	Our policy is...	2
2.	It applies to...	3
3.	Because we want to...	3
4.	We will...	3
5.	Making sure we do what we say...	10
6.	Other things to bear in mind...	11
7.	We'll look at this again...	11
8.	What we mean	11

1. Our Policy...

- 1.1 Ongo Homes (OH) is committed to providing quality homes for those in housing need. We want to let our properties as efficiently as possible, prioritising housing need but also having regard to our Great Landlord Strategy and aim to create sustainable and balanced communities.
- 1.2 We offer a variety of tenure types at Ongo, which are detailed within our dedicated Tenure Policy.
- 1.3 OH supports local authorities (LA) with their strategic housing functions and their duties to meet identified local housing needs. See Appendix A that details our areas of operation and the LA's and Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Schemes we work with.
- 1.4 Ongo does not operate a waiting list for housing. Therefore, any individuals seeking a home with us will need to register directly with the LA and their chosen nomination scheme, for example, CBL. Registering through the LA does not guarantee the applicant will be housed by OH. See section 4.8 for when and why we would refuse an applicant for housing.
- 1.5 We will let our vacant homes via Local Authority (LA) Choice Based Lettings (CBL) systems in order to meet our obligations under our nominations agreements. Under our nominations agreements, the percentage of void properties that must go through the CBL schemes are 'True Voids', which exclude any vacancies created by way of an Ongo tenant moving to another Ongo property.
- 1.6 We understand and acknowledge that housing need is not always identified through the reasonable preference criteria. As such, we will let any properties outside of our nominations agreements through our own advertising platform, My Move, where we will apply additional criteria to address the currently unmet housing need of applicants.
- 1.7 All our homes will be let in line with the Regulator for Social Housing's Tenancy Standard, which states:

Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how their lettings:

- a) Make the best use of available housing*
- b) Are compatible with the purpose of the housing*
- c) Contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities*

There should be clear application, decision-making and appeals processes.

- 1.8 When letting and allocating our homes, we will meet our charitable objects, written within the Ongo Homes Rules, specifically:

A2 - The Association is formed for the benefit of the community. Its charitable objects shall be to carry on for the benefit of the community:

A2.1 – the business of providing and managing housing, including Social Housing, and providing assistance to help house people and associated facilities, amenities and services for poor people, or for the relief of aged, disabled (whether physically or mentally) or chronically sick people;

- 1.9 Although our core role is to provide homes for those in greatest need, as a social housing provider we play a key role in our communities undertaking a range of activities to enhance the lives of our tenants and residents and achieve our corporate objectives – Be a great landlord; Create opportunities; and Offer quality homes.

2. It applies to...

- 2.1 This policy applies to all applicants for housing and transferring tenants.
- 2.2 It applies to all the residential properties that are owned by OH and garages.
- 2.3 This policy does not apply to our:
- Shared Ownership Scheme
 - Rent to Buy Scheme
 - Mutual exchanges
 - Ongo Homeless Service
 - Commercial properties
 - Other specialist housing schemes which have their own nominations and allocations arrangements

3. Because we want to...

- 3.1 The aims of this policy are to ensure:
- We meet our statutory and regulatory obligations
 - We achieve fairness and transparency throughout the lettings process
 - We meet housing need
 - We make best use of housing stock
 - We let properties as efficiently as possible

4. We will...

- 4.1 **Ensure a balanced and fair approach to how and where we advertise our vacant properties**
- 4.1.1 When properties become vacant we will use a system and intelligence based approach to fairly determine which advertising platform the property will be advertised through whilst meeting our nominations agreements.
- 4.1.2 Appendix A details the nominations obligations with the LAs we work with in our areas of operation. The maximum percentage of vacant properties outside of our nominations obligations will be advertised through My Move (including internal transfers) or allocated without advertising by way of a direct let (*see 4.5*).

- 4.1.3 Where we have not been able to let a property, we will make an assessment as to the best course of action to maximise the chance of the property being let. This could include advertising on an alternative platform, amending the advertising criteria and looking at specific marketing initiatives. We will only advertise a property on one platform at any one time (for example, it will never be advertised on a CBL scheme and MyMove at the same time).
- 4.1.4 100% of new development first lets will be advertised through the relevant CBL scheme, unless we have agreed otherwise with the LA through a Section 106 Agreement.
- 4.1.5 We aim to allocate all adapted properties, retirement schemes and specialist accommodation schemes through our CBL schemes, excluding those where a specific agreement with the relevant LA is in place (e.g. learning disability accommodation and the Dementia Care Scheme).
- 4.1.6 We will allocate our adapted properties to the applicant whose needs most closely meet the adaptations to the property. In the first instance we will work with the LA, if no suitable applicants can be found we will contact relevant agencies before making an allocation to someone who does not need an adapted property.
- 4.1.7 Some properties have specific lettings criteria, which can be found in Appendix B, this will be stated on all adverts.
- 4.1.8 Properties will be advertised through My Move for a minimum of 3 days. All CBL schemes have their own advertising cycles, see appendix A.
- 4.2 **How to apply for homes through the different schemes and platforms ...**
- 4.2.1 Appendix A provides the links to the CBL schemes in each area of operation. Each scheme has its own process for registering and bidding for properties and information can be found in the specific CBL Policy for the particular scheme.
- 4.2.2 My Move is an online advertising platform that can be accessed through the Ongo website and Rightmove.
- 4.2.3 Applicants are encouraged to seek help from relatives or friends if experiencing difficulty is accessing My Move where that is an option. If not then Ongo colleagues will be able to assist applicants through the process. To request assistance, applicants should contact Ongo over the phone on 01724 279900 or come speak to someone at Ongo House, High Street, Scunthorpe, DN15 6AT.
- 4.3 **Overcrowding and under occupation**
- 4.3.1 Ongo's approach to letting homes reflects our commitment to making best use of our housing stock and the long term sustainability of our neighbourhoods and communities.

- 4.3.2 Ongo will not normally allocate homes to people of working age in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit if this leads to under occupation (to ensure there is a reasonable expectation that the property will remain affordable), taking into account the size criteria introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- 4.3.3 Ongo may permit one additional bedroom in some circumstances, subject to satisfying an affordability assessment.
- 4.3.4 We do not permit statutory overcrowding and we consider it reasonable that the following people require their own bedroom:
- Couple in a relationship and living together
 - Single parent
 - Household member aged 16 years or over
 - Person with supported / documented medical grounds for their own room
 - Child over 10 years not to share with the opposite sex
 - More than 2 children sharing a bedroom
 - Members of separate households living in one property

4.4 Lettings criteria

- 4.4.1 In order to achieve communities which are balanced, safe, inclusive and sustainable we may implement Local Lettings Policies (LLPs) and/or apply specific lettings criteria on individual properties and/or areas. This would only be applied where a clear business case is evidenced or where a risk assessment indicates potential risks to an individual or the community. In all cases, any such use of LLPs or specific criteria will be recorded and published as appropriate. When in force this may result in offers of accommodation being made to the most suitable applicant on the shortlist regardless of their position.
- 4.4.2 We may sometimes need to allocate a property sensitively taking into account the potential impact of the let on existing residents in the area. For example, this could be the case where there is previous age-designated stock or where there has been issues relating to anti-social behaviour or community cohesion.
- 4.4.3 We will take into account specific criteria for sensitive lets and this may exclude some applicants from applying and preference will be given to applicants who meet the criteria, which may not be in the order of the shortlist.
- 4.4.4 Age criteria apply to all retirement scheme properties and other specified properties. However, there may be circumstances when this restriction may be waived e.g. medical need or if a property is becoming hard to let. This will be managed on a case-by-case basis and having regard to community cohesion and tenancy sustainability.

4.5 Direct Lets

4.5.1 There may be instances where we don't advertise our properties at all and make direct offers of housing. Examples of when we may use this approach include, but is not limited to:

- Ongo Homes tenants who have lost their home as a result of a fire or flood and require housing
- Management move
- Ex-offenders subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)
- Applicants/tenants who are at imminent risk of violence or a threat of violence e.g. victims of domestic violence, hate crime or through witness protection scheme
- Applicants who are in need of specialist accommodation
- Circumstances when it has been agreed to allow a former joint tenant to be re-granted the tenancy
- Circumstances when it has been agreed to re-grant the tenancy after tenants notice to quit has been exercised

4.6 Determining priority for housing

4.6.1 Applicants' priority for housing and bedroom need through CBL schemes will be assessed and determined by the relevant LA.

4.6.2 Applicants' priority for housing through MyMove will be assessed and determined by OH. To demonstrate our commitment as a registered provider of social housing, to ensure compliance with the Tenancy Standard from the Regulator for Social Housing and to meet our charitable objectives, we will give equal priority to those applicants that demonstrate they meet any of the reasonable preference categories set out in s166A of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011.

4.6.3 The applicants who meet the reasonable preference criteria will always be prioritised ahead of those that don't.

4.6.4 Both criteria can be found in Appendix C. Reasonable preference criteria is equal priority and only 1 category can apply. The additional criteria is equal priority but more than 1 criteria can apply.

4.6.5 In making our lettings decision we will also consider which applicants needs most closely match the available property and will always try to make the most sustainable let.

4.6.6 Where My Move applicants have equal priority, we will consider who best meets the bedroom numbers in the home, where applicants are still equal, we will take into account the length of time the housing need has existed and this will inform the decision.

4.7 Eligibility for our homes

4.7.1 Certain groups of people are ineligible by law to be considered for social housing. In such cases we will assess individually following Government guidelines. See section 4.12 on Right to Rent.

4.7.2 When an applicant registers an interest to be housed with Ongo Homes, the following will be taken into account:

- Tenancy history over the past 12 months
- Anti-Social Behaviour and / or offending history
- Affordability
- Payment record in respect of rent / mortgage payments
- Support / vulnerability needs being met
- Right to Rent
- Condition of property (transfers)
- Length of tenancy (transfers)

4.7.3 We believe that nobody should be restricted to applying for housing because of their age. Therefore, age restrictions will only be applied in line with our Lettings Criteria, and/or where any Local Lettings Policy or sensitive let criteria is in place.

4.7.4 Applicants who are homeowners will be considered for housing with OH if they meet any of the criteria below; where appropriate we will require evidence the property is being marketed for sale.

- They require retirement living
- Their mortgage lender is repossessing their home
- Their relationship has broken down, as a result they need to sell their home
- Their relationship has broken down and they have left the family home but remain on the mortgage for financial reasons
- Their current home is unsuitable due to ill-health or disability

4.8 When and why we will refuse applicants for housing with us

4.8.1 When assessing applicants for housing we will act reasonably and each application will be assessed on its own merit taking all relevant information into account. Where there are mitigating circumstances or further information is required to make an informed decision we will consult as appropriate with any relevant agencies including social services, police, probation and providers of support services.

4.8.2 Reasons for refusal include but are not limited to:

- No Right to Rent
- Failing an affordability assessment
- Unable to pay the minimum of 2 weeks rent in advance
- Applicant is assessed as unlikely to be able to sustain a tenancy even with support and therefore poses a financial risk to OH

- Refusal to consent to relevant checks and/or provides false information in support of their application
- Failure to provide required information or accept an offer of housing within the timescale given
- Former Tenancy Rent Arrears over £250 with OH or any other landlord
- Previous OH tenants who have outstanding re-chargeable repairs due to leaving their property in an unacceptable condition
- Eviction by any landlord on the grounds of ASB within the last 3 years
- Applicant (or member of their household) has previously been the perpetrator of verbal or physical abuse or harassment against OH staff or contractors, or demonstrates this behaviour during the application/allocation process
- Applicant (or member of their household) would pose a significant risk of harm to the health & safety of staff, contractors and the community. Criminal convictions and other intelligence from our partners and other agencies will be considered in OH's assessment of risk
- Applicant does not meet lettings criteria
- OH or any other landlord has commenced legal proceedings for a breach of tenancy
- Number of people in household would result in over occupation of the property they are applying for

4.8.3 If, following an offer of housing, additional information is received that would have caused us to refuse the applicant for housing, we reserve the right to withdraw the offer at this time.

4.8.4 If after a tenancy has started it is discovered that the applicant (s) provided false information to obtain the tenancy OH will take steps to gain possession of the property.

4.9 **Transfers**

4.9.1 Where a current tenant wants to move to another of our properties (internal transfer) they will not be eligible until the following criteria is met:

- Current rent account is clear and has been positively managed for a reasonable period of time
- There are no other housing related debt e.g. recharges
- There are no open tenancy management or ASB cases
- There have been no significant tenancy breaches in the last 12 months
- Satisfying a pre-leaving inspection

4.9.2 In addition to the above, where tenants are assessed as having no/low housing need they will not normally be considered for a transfer until they have held their

current tenancy with us for at least 2 years and have positively managed their tenancy for a reasonable period of time.

4.9.3 In exceptional circumstances if the above criteria has not been met we may consider a transfer in accordance with our Exceptions Procedure. For example, where a transfer would aid in the resolution of anti-social behaviour.

4.9.4 Any customers transferring either internally or from another Registered Provider of Social Housing or Local Authority will not lose any security of tenure where there is no break.

4.10 Housing employees, board members and their close relatives

4.10.1 Applications can be accepted for employees, board members and their close relatives (referred to as Relevant Persons), provided they are eligible and will receive equal treatment to all other applicants in the allocation of housing (including transfer and re-housing applications).

4.10.2 In line with our Probity Policy, applicants must disclose any such relationship at the time of applying, and any employee or board member with an interest in or who has a close relationship with a Relevant Person whose application is being considered, will declare that interest and discontinue any involvement they might have in that person's application.

4.10.3 Any decisions to allocate properties, re-house or transfer Relevant Persons will be approved at the appropriate level in line with our Probity Policy.

4.11 Housing Minors

4.11.1 Where a successful applicant is aged between 16 and 18 years of age, they will need to appoint a person to hold their tenancy on trust until they reach their 18th birthday. If it is not possible to find a suitable Trustee, we will not grant a tenancy until the applicant reaches 18 years of age. There is no requirement for us to find a Trustee. Eligibility checks will be carried out on both the applicant and the appointee.

4.12 Right to Rent

4.12.1 Since 1st February 2016 immigration checks are required under the Immigration Act 2014 for all new qualifying lettings in the UK. The checks known as "right to rent" checks are to verify the potential customer is permitted to be in the UK and has the right to rent.

4.13 OH are required by law to carry out "right to rent" checks on applicants and any adult household members for offers of accommodation by way of direct applications that have not been nominated by the local authority (e.g housing waiting list, CBL Scheme, nomination agreement, homelessness or social services duty)

4.14 Appeals

4.14.1 Applicants who are unhappy with their priority banding through the CBL platform can appeal to the relevant CBL organisation (e.g. HomeChoiceLincs).

4.14.2 Applicants who are unhappy with Lettings decisions made by Ongo Homes can appeal through our own appeals process. You can do this by contacting us digitally, over the phone or by coming to see us.

4.15 Exceptions to this policy

4.15.1 We always aim to do the right thing for both us and our applicants. There may be circumstances which mean we need to work outside of this policy. We will apply a common-sense approach in our decision making in line with our Exceptions Procedure. All matters will be managed on a case-by-case basis and approval given by the Lettings Team Leader.

4.16 Garage Lets

4.16.1 We will only let garages to applicants over 18 years of age.

4.16.2 Lets are made according to the date of application.

4.16.3 Any specially adapted garages for disabled people will only be let to applicants who have demonstrable proof of need and own a car.

4.16.4 Applications for garages will not be approved whilst rent arrears against any current or former tenancy or any other debt with Ongo Homes exists and/or any other court action is in place.

4.16.5 Customers will sign a garage licence on allocation of a garage and abide by the conditions contained within.

4.16.6 We will take payment of one month rent at sign-up – the amount of this payment will be dependent on whether the applicant is a current Ongo Homes tenant or leaseholder or neither.

5. Making sure we do what we say...

5.1 The Lettings Manager is responsible for making sure this policy is implemented.

5.2 The Lettings Manager is responsible for making sure:

- All identified staff are aware of this policy
- All staff are trained relevant to their role within this policy
- Monitoring records are kept in accordance with this policy; and
- Customers are adequately informed of the policy and support is given to them to help understand it

5.3 We will make sure we are doing what we say we will by measuring our performance through a suite of indicators on a monthly basis.

- 5.4 We will record all lettings as required by the Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) System.

6. Other things to bear in mind...

- 6.1 This policy also links to our:

- Ongo Homes Rules
- Great Landlord Strategy
- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Relevant local authority bidding schemes and policies
- Tenure Policy
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Mental Capacity Guidance
- Tenancy Agreement

- 6.2 The main pieces of legislation and regulation relevant to this policy include:

- The Housing Acts 1985 and 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Regulator's Tenancy Standard

7. We'll look at this again...

- 7.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years'. We will review earlier if any regulatory or legislative changes occur and have an impact on this policy.

8. What we mean...

Reference	Definition
Balanced Communities	Made up of mixed demographics and profiles, variable income and economic status and the vulnerabilities and support needs of the tenants.
Lettings Nominations Agreement	This includes advertising, shortlisting, pre-tenancy checks and allocation, and agreement negotiated between the Council and Ongo Homes which guarantees the Council's ability to access Ongo Homes owned new build accommodation and relets for applicants on the Council's Housing Register, either via a Choice Based Lettings system or some alternative route.
Internal transfer	Where a tenant transfers from one OH property to another.
Section 106 Agreement	An agreement made between the Council and developers; these are linked to planning permissions and can also be known as planning obligations. These are used to mitigate the impact of a new development on the community and infrastructure.
Homeless	In line with the Housing Act 1996, you are homeless if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• have been evicted from your home• are asked to leave by friends or family

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • must leave due to violence • can't stay due to fire or flood • are sleeping on the streets
Homeless Priority need	<p>You will be in priority need if you're:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a family with children under 16 (or under 19 if still dependent on you) • pregnant • a care leaver aged 18-20 • homeless due to a fire, flood or other disaster • classed as 'vulnerable'
Viewings	Viewings could be in person at the property, video tours or photographs.
Management Move	Where there are exceptional circumstances which require a move for a current OH tenant to alleviate an urgent housing problem in line with OH Lettings Exception Procedure.
Sensitive Let	A sensitive let is usually required when a previous tenant of a property has caused significant nuisance, alarm or distress to the community.
Statutory Overcrowding	There are two 'standards' used to help work out overcrowding. Use them both to work out if your home is overcrowded. You can access the standards here .
Key workers	<p>The legal definition of “Key Worker” means any person working or engaged in work with a public sector body or similar organisation who provides services that are essential for the continued sustainability of the community and economy local to the property to be let.</p> <p>In terms of determining priority for housing with Ongo Homes, we will consider the following as key workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) the NHS (2) the social services; (3) the fire service; (4) police service; (5) the teaching/education services; (6) the prison service and the probation service
Local Lettings Policy (LLP)	These are tools that can be used to respond to specific local circumstances that outline special rules that apply to specific areas or developments where applicants may be prioritised in a slightly different way or have to meet certain criteria in order to be considered.