

# LETTINGS POLICY

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## 1. Introduction

This policy outlines Citizen's approach to letting and re-letting homes that it owns or manages. It is designed to provide a clear framework that supports a responsive and equitable allocation of housing. The policy aims to ensure that homes are let in a way that reflects the individual's needs: considering their housing requirements, financial situation, and personal aspirations, while also promoting the sustainability of the communities in which Citizen operates.

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In addition to guiding the lettings process, this policy outlines the various types of tenancies and licences that may be offered. It explains the purpose of each tenure type, the duration for which it is granted, and the specific circumstances under which each is applied.

We hold a number of nomination and Section 106 agreements, where we must ensure full compliance with these obligations when letting our properties

## 2. Scope

This policy sets out the core principles that guide how we let our homes. For further information about how we apply this policy please refer to Citizen's Lettings Statement.

It applies to general needs social housing, affordable rent properties, intermediate market rents, retirement living, Rent to Buy homes, and properties within our care and supported housing portfolio.

The policy does not apply to tenants or leaseholders who hold an equity interest in their property.

## 3. Policy Detail

### 3.1 How we let our homes

Most properties are allocated through local authority Choice Based Lettings Schemes (CBL) or other partnership CBL schemes. Citizen does not keep its own waiting list for housing. Information on how each local authority allocates housing can be found on their website.

Citizen can choose to allocate a percentage of homes to our existing customers where this would make the best use of our homes. When there are properties advertised we will apply our eligibility criteria this includes having regard to our charitable status.

We are committed to the following objectives when letting and managing our tenancies and licences to:

- ensure our lettings contribute towards balanced and sustainable communities.
- give customers as much choice as possible.
- ensure that any tenancy or licence fits individual circumstances.
- provide services that support and enable access to appropriately sized accommodation therefore reducing under-occupancy and overcrowding.

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- let properties quickly and appropriately, minimising the number of empty properties, meeting demand and maximising rent income.
- provide good quality homes which are ready to let.
- cooperate with the local authorities, to meet local housing need. Where we have nomination agreements in place we will continue to work in partnership.
- ensure services are responsive and that we work within, ensuring equal opportunities for all applicants for housing.
- consider reasonable adjustments and where appropriate, signposting to other agencies that may be able to deliver the support
- ensure that customers understand their rights and responsibilities with regards to their tenancies.

This policy meets the requirements of UK legislation and the Regulator for Social Housing Consumer Standards (for more information see our Tenancy Management Policy). In developing this policy, we have also considered the relevant local authority tenancy strategies for areas in which Citizen owns homes.

### 3.2 **Tenure**

We offer a range of tenancy and licence types. The type offered will be determined based on factors such as whether the applicant has previously held a tenancy or licence, their homelessness status if they are in temporary accommodation, and the nature of the accommodation they are being housed in. Full details of the tenancy and licence types we offer are provided in our Tenancy Management Policy.

### 3.3 **Starter tenancies**

New customers in general needs and retirement living homes who have not held a secure tenancy or an assured periodic tenancy with any local authority or registered provider, or an assured shorthold tenancy with us, will be offered a 12-month starter tenancy, this will be an assured shorthold tenancy.

The exception to this is customers who live in properties in the following circumstances:

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- Immediate Market Rent
- Next Steps and Rough Sleepers schemes

The above will be offered an assured short-hold tenancy.

### **3.4 Transfers**

Citizen does not operate its own housing transfer policy. Instead, we direct customers who wish to move to their local authority's choice-based lettings allocation system. However, in exceptional circumstances, we may consider either an Emergency or Discretionary move in line with this policy.

Applicants will only be considered for an offer of alternative accommodation through choice-based lettings where they:

- have no outstanding rent, court costs or rechargeable debts
- have maintained the property in good condition
- have complied with the terms of their tenancy
- cannot afford or readily obtain housing on the open market

### **3.5 Temporary Moves**

There may be occasions where customers are moved from their homes either on a temporary or permanent basis due to emergency or major work required at their home. When assessing temporary or permanent moves, the needs of the customer and any vulnerabilities will be taken into consideration.

Temporary moves will be identified and agreed by maintenance operation and asset management managers and are identified as;

- Awaab's Law Hazards – Statutory temporary moves
- Major works – planned temporary moves
- Major incidents – reactive temporary moves

If a hazard is identified in a property under Awaab's law and we are unable to complete the relevant safety work within the initial remediation period (**5 working days from the completion of the investigation that identified the hazard for a significant hazard or 24 hours for an emergency hazard**) we must provide suitable alternative accommodation, refer to 3.5.1 below.

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### **3.5.1 Alternative accommodation**

Where possible, customers will be encouraged to stay with friends or family whilst work is ongoing in their home, and a daily disturbance payment will be made to them.

Where staying with friends or family is not possible, we will facilitate temporary moves which will usually be into a hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation.

Should it be determined, that work will take longer than expected, a temporary move to an alternative Citizen property will be considered.

Where accommodation is provided this will be managed by a Neighbourhood Services Manager or Neighbourhood Officer and we will make all reasonable attempts to ensure that it is suitable for the household and that minimises disruption. The alternative accommodation will be provided for anyone who permanently lives in the property, for children who live there for at least one night a week and in line with the maximum number of occupants allowed under the tenancy agreement.

If the customer does not want to move out of their home temporarily, we will consider undertaking work with the customer still in occupation. We will require written notice from them confirming they have been advised of the risks, and they have chosen to remain in the property and that they have been provided with information about how to stay safe.

We will communicate clearly and promptly with tenants about any identified hazards and required actions, in full compliance with Awaab's Law.

### **3.5.2 Payments**

We will agree with the customer on what, if any, additional costs and compensation/inconvenience payments there may be should they be required to stay in suitable alternative accommodation. This will be managed by the Neighbourhood Officer.

## **3.6 Permanent moves**

A permanent move is one where the customer moves out with no intention of returning to their original home. Permanent moves can be identified as moves;

- Due to demolition
- Emergency transfers (see section 3.7)
- Discretionary moves (see section 3.7)

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### **3.6.1 Due to demolition**

We may need to rehouse customers due to the demolition or refurbishment of their home. We will ensure that customers affected by such schemes are offered rehousing that is fair and timely to ensure schemes are not delayed. Where a permanent move is required, we will award statutory compensation where appropriate and may consider discretionary compensation dependant on individual circumstances.

## **3.7 Housing for people at risk (emergency transfers and discretionary moves)**

In certain situations, there may be an urgent need for a customer to be rehoused and it may not be possible to rehouse the household within our normal arrangements.

We are not able to facilitate moves where there is a market or intermediate market rent, Rent to Buy in place or from shared ownership properties. We may also not be able to facilitate a new move where new members have been invited to join the original household as detailed in the tenancy agreement.

### **3.7.1 Emergency Transfers**

Emergency Transfers will be considered where circumstances threaten the life or safety of the household if they remained in the property. We will work with statutory partner organisations to confirm the circumstances and severity of the situation and to ensure our decisions are appropriate.

If we are unable to obtain any supporting evidence from external agencies or professionals, it is unlikely that we will award an emergency transfer.

This will only be facilitated when alternative accommodation is available. Emergency transfers will be agreed by the Neighbourhood Services Manager.

### **3.7.2 Discretionary Moves**

Discretionary moves may be considered where there are circumstances that seriously impact on the health or wellbeing of the customer, or other household member, if they were to remain in the property. This would be for example when a household needs to move due to a medical condition which will cause permanent damage or disability if they do not move.

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We may also use discretionary moves where this would make best use of stock – for example extreme under-occupancy.

Discretionary moves will be agreed by the Neighbourhood Services Manager, a senior Manager in Care and Supported Housing, the Head of Allocations and Lettings or the Lettings Manager

Prior to a discretionary move we will explore other available options, which may be more effective solution and less disruptive.

### **3.7.3 Offers of accommodation (Emergency Transfers and Discretionary Moves)**

Once approved the alternative accommodation will be provided as quickly as possible.

Customers will be offered housing in any area that removes them from the situation of immediate risk. Unless the customer is moving due to under-occupation we will offer customers one property that is the same size and type as their current home. We will not offer a discretionary move to a home bigger than the customer's current home.

If customers refuse an offer of accommodation without good reason they may be removed from the emergency transfer and discretionary move process.

## **3.8 Access to Housing**

### **3.8.1 Requirements**

All our tenants and licensees must agree, and have arrangements in place, to:

- Pay their rent by direct debit on a date agreed.
- Agree to have an image of themselves uploaded onto our database as part of our sign-up process.
- Agree to our information sharing protocol.
- Not be subject to restricted access to housing as detailed in section 3.8.2 below.
- Have participated in any pre-tenancy or licence programme that they have been referred to.
- Participate in any support arrangements as identified or as a requirement of specific schemes.
- Make payments in accordance with our tenancy and licence agreements.

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Prior to an authorised officer signing either a tenancy or licence agreement the individual officer must have evidence that these undertakings are in place, including evidence of any advance rent payment.

The Lettings Manager or Head of Allocations and Lettings may agree to vary one or more of these requirements when circumstances dictate.

### **3.8.2        Restricted access to housing**

We will not normally accept the following applicants for housing:

- Applicants under 18 years of age, except in specialist accommodation schemes where effective support is in place, in general needs homes let as part of specific previously agreed project partnerships with some LAs and those with an Equitable Tenancy agreement.
- Applicants subject to immigration control or a person from abroad unless they are a qualifying person. A right to rent check will be completed for every applicant.
- Applicants or members of their family who have caused anti-social behaviour either in or around one of our properties or another landlord's properties. Further details on our approach to anti-social behaviour are set out in our Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy.
- Applicants with outstanding debts to us, another registered provider or local authority because of failure to pay rent, court costs, rechargeable repairs or any other housing related debt.
- Applicants where there have been previous breaches of tenancy or licence through non-payment of rent.
- Applicants who cannot demonstrate that they can sustain a tenancy or licence because they cannot afford to pay the rent. We will carry out affordability assessments for all our applicants ensuring that we support the applicant to maximise their income. If it is apparent that an applicant cannot afford the rent for a property, a tenancy or licence will not be offered. If this is the case, we will give advice about potential alternative solutions that may be available to them.
- Owner-occupiers / leaseholders except where housing needs are not being met and there are exceptional circumstances.

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- Where the accommodation we offer does not and cannot reasonably meet an applicant's support needs or applicants demonstrate that they need a higher level of support which we or another provider cannot reasonably facilitate.
- Applicants who following an assessment cannot demonstrate that they currently have the appropriate skills in place to be able to manage a tenancy or licence effectively.
- Where applicants have been proven to act fraudulently when securing a home or in the subsequent conduct of a tenancy or licence with any local authority or registered provider.

We do not automatically consider anyone ineligible for housing if they have a previous conviction(s). Where an appropriate assessment has been carried out, in line with our procedures, and we are concerned that an applicant will pose a risk to themselves, our staff and contractors, their home or the wider community then they may be deemed ineligible for housing.

### **3.9 Responding to offers of accommodation**

We will remove the offer of accommodation and will not make any further offers of accommodation where applicants have been made an offer and have:

- made no contact to arrange to view the property
- failed to turn up to an appointment to view the property
- failed to complete the sign-up process or provided information reasonably requested

And/or;

- where applicants have been made three offers of accommodation and these have been refused.

We also reserve the right not to make an offer when we feel further background checks are required before we decide whether to offer a property and the information is not provided to us within two working days by the applicant. Where additional information is required from other organisations in order for us to establish the applicant's ability to sustain a tenancy or licence, and that is not received, we also reserve the right not to make an offer.

### **3.10 Tenancy Fraud**

Tenancy and licence fraud is a criminal offence. We will use our legal powers and partnership working to detect and pursue tenancy fraud so that homes are available to those that really need them. If an applicant has knowingly or recklessly provided false information and tenancy fraud is proven, which resulted in the allocation of a property they would have not

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otherwise been entitled to, we will act to recover possession of the property and all costs. We will also report the fraud to all relevant authorities and registered providers who ask us. This may adversely affect any housing application the perpetrator makes to other registered providers.

### **3.11 Joint Tenancies**

A joint tenancy is a tenancy held by two or more parties, who share equal responsibility in adhering to the conditions of the tenancy. Where a joint tenancy exists, all parties are jointly liable for paying rent, any outstanding debts and must abide by all tenancy conditions.

Applications for joint tenancies will be considered and assessed on a case-by-case basis. The decision to accept or refuse an application is at the discretion of Citizen but will be based on individual circumstances of the applicants. This decision will be evidenced.

There are no legal obligations for us to offer joint tenancies when requested.

### **3.12 Management of empty homes**

We are committed to letting our empty homes quickly. Our aim is to minimise rent loss, keep the number of empty properties as low as possible and thereby maximise the availability of housing to meet need.

We will repair our empty properties in accordance with an agreed lettable standard and will regularly review those standards.

### **3.13 Exceptions**

Flexibility regarding the restrictions and criteria set out in this policy will be considered in exceptional cases.

### **3.14 Lettings to staff, board members and involved tenants**

We will not allocate a property to a board member, member of staff, involved tenant or close relative of these groups unless the following conditions are met;

- The applicant would normally qualify for the tenancy or licence under the appropriate Choice Based Lettings Scheme and this policy.
- The board member, member of staff or involved tenant was not involved or had influence in the allocation process.
- The allocation has been authorised in line with our probity policy and procedures.

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For information relatives include; spouses or partners, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, and siblings. This statement also applies to someone who has a relationship with a board member or employee, such that, there is a risk any decision taken by the board member or employee could be influenced. These rules also apply to former employee and board members for a period of 12 months after they leave their post.

### **3.15 Appeals and complaints**

If a tenant, licensee or applicant wants to make a complaint about the service they have received this will be dealt with in line with our Complaints Policy.

Examples of this will include but are not limited to;

- If Citizen decides they are not eligible for an offer because they meet one of the criteria in section 3.8.2 related to restricted access for housing, for example, anti-social behaviour.
- They feel they have been unfairly treated in the lettings process, for example being unfairly skipped for a property that they think they are suitable for.

When complaints or appeals are received, this will not hold-up the allocations process for the property under dispute.

Where the complaint concerns a decision made by a local authority e.g. the decision to nominate for a particular property, the appeal should be directed to the nominating local authority. This will not hold-up the allocations process for the property under dispute.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of the Board to seek assurance that this Policy is successfully implemented. The Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this Policy and that all staff understand the importance of this Policy, the related procedures and that they comply with them.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that their team have undertaken the appropriate Policy eLearning and training.

Any changes to this Policy must be made in line with the requirements set out in Citizens Standing Orders and our Policy framework.

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## 5. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 year/s, unless legislation, service delivery or sector developments require otherwise ensuring the policy continues to meet its objectives and take account of good practice developments.

Legal advice will be taken to ensure compliance with legal, regulatory and contractual responsibilities.

Where appropriate service delivery reports in respect of this policy as incorporated into our quarterly reporting suite.

## 6. Equality Impact Assessment

This policy has been subject to an Equality Analysis. Staff working across Citizen have considered the impact of this policy on different groups and communities that we work with. In framing this policy, our staff are committed to not discriminate adversely against any group and will respect the diversity of the communities we are working within.

## 7. Version control

EVERY change made must be logged in the version control and ALL boxes completed.

VERSION	DATE	AMENDMENTS	APPROVED AT/BY	NEXT FULL REVIEW
V1.0	September 2022	New Policy. Lettings separated from the Tenancy Management Policy.	ELT	September 2025
V2.0	November 2022	Date changed due to taking to November 2022 board.	Board	September 2025
V3.0	June 2023	References added to new Rent to Buy product. Immaterial change.	Policy owner – Director of Housing, Care and Support	September 2025
4.0	Dec 2024	Added 4.15 Appeals	Policy owner – Director of Housing, Care and Support	September 2025
5.0	February 2025	Clarification in 4.3 on when Citizen can offer transfers	Policy owner – Director of Housing, Care and Support	September 2025
6.0	November 2025	Strengthened section on temporary moves and removal of legislation and list of tenancies offered. This can be found in the Tenancy Management Policy. <i>This policy comes into effect from 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026.</i>	Board	September 2028

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