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## Selection of Applicants and Allocation of Dwellings Policy

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Author: Carolyn Arnold & Gill Rigby  
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### 1. Introduction

- Harborne Parish Lands Charity (HPLC) was set up to relieve need in the Ancient Parish of Harborne (the parish) over 400 years ago.
- It is a registered social landlord and a registered charity run by a board of voluntary Trustees.
- HPLC owns and manages 99 dwellings (the almshouses) in five schemes for older or disabled poor people in housing need in the parish.
- The almshouses are not let on tenancies, they are let on licences as residents are "beneficiaries" of the charity appointed by the Trustees under the terms of the Charity Commissioner's Scheme. Residents have no succession rights but if one of a couple passes away and the surviving one was not named on the licence agreement, the person will usually be allowed to remain in the property on a new licence, subject to agreement by the Trustees.
- Residents pay a weekly maintenance charge (the charge) rather than rent. Some of the charge is eligible for Housing Benefit.
- ⊖ Using this policy, the Almshouse Committee will consider reports prepared by HPLC staff and make the decision about who will be accepted onto the waiting list:-

### 2. Aims of this policy

HPLC aims to:

- Provide a service that is responsive to local people's needs and is accountable to applicants, residents, and the wider community.
- Provide good quality, well-managed almshouse accommodation for those in need.
- Maximise the use of our dwellings and resources through effective void management
- Operate an allocation and selection process that promotes a person-centred approach. We believe that where possible, people should be able to exercise choice over where they live, and that we should be responsive to their needs and wishes where we can.
- Design our selection and allocations policy to be open, concise, effective, and easily understandable.
- Treat applicants fairly and according to their level of need without regard to their race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender re-assignment as described in our Anti-Discrimination Statement.
- Encourage applications from all sections of the community and not place unnecessary barriers in the way of any applicant.
- Monitor the effectiveness of this policy in respect of equality of opportunity by seeking a variety of information from applicants.

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- Assist applicants and residents wherever possible by identifying any support needs
  - prior to acceptance onto the waiting list and the offer of accommodation and
  - through a 'settling-in' visit shortly after a successful applicant moves into an almshouse.
- Formally review this policy every two years, or earlier in response to changes in statutory or regulatory requirements or other circumstances.
- Use feedback from surveys and any complaints or appeals to measure applicants' and residents' satisfaction. This feedback will be used to influence the improvement of the service and the future development of this policy.

### 3. Eligible Applicants

To join the waiting list, applicants must:

- Be aged 60 or over. They can apply up to one year prior to their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday so that their application may be approved and held until they turn 60.  
Note: if a couple applies and one person is under 60, only the person aged 60 or over can be named on the licence. The under 60 applicant must sign a consent form agreeing to vacate the property if the eligible licensee:
  - \* passes away
  - \* permanently leaves the property, or
  - \* ends the relationship.
- Live in the Ancient Parish of Harborne (see definition below) except that when a vacancy occurs, if there is no-one from within the parish on the waiting list, applicants from outside the parish who otherwise qualify will be considered.
- Be in housing need.
- Have a low income and savings or assets (including any property owned) worth less than £125,000. A low income is defined as 60% of median income after housing costs have been deducted.
- Be capable of living independently, albeit with support from carers or support workers.

Eligible applicants are required to pay the first week's charge when accepting an offer of accommodation. Applicants who have no housing or support needs will not be accepted onto the waiting list.

### 4. Eligible Applicants Who Require Wheelchair Adapted Accommodation

Only 7% of HPLC's almshouse properties are wheelchair adapted and so the charity is committed to ensuring that this limited number of properties are

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occupied by those who need them. Therefore, applicants who fit the criteria for a wheelchair adapted property are placed on a shortlist for this specialist housing which is used to prioritise who will be considered for such a property when one becomes available. It will be made clear to the applicant that being placed on the shortlist for specialist housing does not mean an offer of accommodation is guaranteed.

When an application is received a phone call with the applicant is used to complete a basic screening to ensure that the applicant meets the other criteria for our housing. To ensure the specialist housing shortlist is accurate a letter will be sent to applicants every two years to ensure that the applicant is still in need of specialist housing, and they are still eligible to be housed by HPLC. Due to the lack of these properties, home assessment visits are arranged once a property is to become void rather than when an application is received. This prevents building up the applicant's expectations as there may be a very long wait.

### 5. Ineligible Applicants

Applicants are not eligible to join the waiting list if they:

- Require assistance from HPLC staff in taking medication, although they may receive assistance from others.
- Require care or support in addition to the support provided by HPLC and the following applies:
  - Contact has been made with both local authority and other agencies to attempt to secure necessary care or support but it is not available
  - The level of support required would undermine HPLC's ability to support other residents in a scheme
  - HPLC are unable to make reasonable adjustments to enable the applicant to live in the property.
- May be a risk to other residents, their visitors, staff or the wider community. A needs and risk assessment will be completed before acceptance onto the waiting list.
- Have caused a nuisance or annoyance to any person and have been served with an NSP, a civil injunction, Community Protection Notice (CPN) or Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) .
- Have allowed their home to be used for immoral or illegal purposes or physically or verbally assaulted staff of a housing organisation, Local Authority or their agents and contractors. Evidence of this may include an NSP, ASBO or injunction, but other evidence may be used.
- Owe rent, mortgage or other housing debts unless they have entered into and maintained a repayment agreement for at least 13 weeks, or 26 weeks if the debt is higher than £999. However all cases will be assessed individually and

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the cause of the debt, along with the applicant's ability and willingness to repay will be taken into consideration. Where the debt is solely due to non-payment of welfare benefit and the applicant can provide evidence that they have done everything to ensure that the claim is paid, or where a person is owed a duty under homeless legislation, housing debts will be disregarded.

- Do not want to move. If someone moves unwillingly they are unlikely to settle well into their new home and may be unhappy.
- Have provided us with false information or have given us incomplete details.

Decisions to reject applications are taken seriously and all information will come from an authoritative source such as our own records; the Police; agencies such as Probation or Social Services; and other landlords. HPLC will use the documented evidence to reach a decision.

We will monitor and record reasons when applicants are rejected. Where an applicant is refused entry onto our waiting list we will inform them in writing giving:

- Our reasons
- Details of other housing options
- Information about their right of appeal

### 6. Applying For Accommodation

- Anyone can apply for accommodation but only those meeting the criteria above can be accepted onto the waiting list.
- We accept applications from individuals as well as from referral, statutory and voluntary agencies.
- Applicants are required to complete an application form.
- Upon receipt of an application form from an eligible applicant or when a vacancy is expected, a home visit or an office interview (if the applicant is homeless, lives a long distance away or visiting their home may cause harm due to domestic abuse or other harassment) will be arranged, attended by two members of HPLC staff to assess the applicant's needs.
- Translation and interpretation services will be provided when required, including for people with a visual or aural impairment.
- Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council have nomination rights to some of the almshouses. Their nominees must meet the eligibility criteria above. Nominations will be treated in the same way as other applicants.
- HPLC will use local authorities' Choice Based Lettings schemes to advertise vacancies where deemed necessary by the Housing Manager.

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- All information provided to us in connection with an application will remain confidential between the applicant and HPLC, except when it may be used to provide details upon request to Local Authorities or other Government or Public Bodies, including those reporting to the Home Office, as described in the application form, and as regulated by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### 7. Assessment of Need

When assessing applications we will consider:

- The existing housing conditions of the applicant, including overcrowding, sharing of facilities, the state of repair of their current home, compulsory purchase orders and the level of crime or anti-social behaviour in the area.
- The applicant's ability to cope with their existing housing conditions.
- The medical and social needs of the applicant. Problems such as isolation, the inability to climb stairs, or cope with the cleaning or maintenance of their home will be taken into account.
- Time spent on the waiting list if all other considerations are equal. Applicants remain on the waiting list for 12 months. If they have not been re-housed within a year, an application renewal form will be sent to them to confirm whether they wish to remain on the list, and to record any changes in circumstances. If they do not respond within two weeks they will be removed from the list.
- The scheme applied for, because some schemes have more facilities than others and may be more or less suitable for some applicants.
- The dependency of the applicant and the frailty of existing residents. We will not house a frail person in a scheme where that individual's needs exceed the available support resources.
- Recent bereavement. It is not generally considered good practice to house someone who has recently been bereaved because s/he may move too soon and then later regret it. It is preferable to wait 12 months, although there will always be cases where this is not possible.

### 8. Priorities

It is a requirement of our Supported Exempt Accommodation status that residents have support needs, although their support needs may not be met by HPLC.

Once a support need has been identified, applicants on the waiting list will be prioritised for an offer of accommodation as follows:

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- **1A** Homeless applicants
- **1B** Potentially homeless applicants
- **2A** The applicant is suffering or threatened with violence or harassment.
- **2B** Applicants who are at risk because their present home is detrimental to their health due to the lack of appropriate facilities or its poor state of repair, medical conditions or disability of the applicant. Examples include dampness, a lack of adequate shower facilities, lack of heating or an emergency call system.
- **3** People whose current accommodation is detrimental to their quality of life or who have difficulty in coping due to the location. This category includes those who feel insecure (perhaps because of burglaries), isolated, lonely or depressed.
- **4** Those who are adequately accommodated but who would benefit from the HPLC support service.

Applicants will be made one reasonable offer of accommodation. If the offer is refused, the applicant will be removed from the waiting list and will not be able to reapply for 12 months. The applicant has the right of appeal against this decision.

### 9. Transfers

Residents requesting a transfer will be visited. We will offer advice and support regarding alternative housing options.

There are three grounds for a transfer:

- Medical - for example where a resident's needs change and they would benefit from a move on health grounds
- Social - for example following a traumatic experience
- Major Repairs - for example to enable work to be carried out within their home which would not be possible while they are in occupation.

Trustees will consider applications for a transfer on other grounds in exceptional circumstances. Each case will be considered on its merits.

To be eligible for a transfer, residents should usually have:

- A clear charges account
- Kept to the terms of their Letter of Appointment.

The Trustees will either allow or refuse a transfer request and the resident will be notified of the decision as well as their right of appeal.

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### 10. Appeals

Housing and transfer applicants have the right to appeal against decisions at every stage of the procedure and have recourse to our Complaints Procedure if they are dissatisfied. All appeals are acknowledged within five working days.

The appeals process has three stages:

- Applicants may appeal in writing or in person within 10 working days of the original decision. Their appeal will be considered by the Almshouse Committee at their next meeting. The applicant will be notified of the decision within seven days of the meeting.
- If the applicant is still dissatisfied, they can appeal to the Board of Trustees within 10 working days. Applicants will be notified of the Trustees decision within seven days of the appeal being considered.
- Applicants have a further right of appeal to the Independent Housing Ombudsman.

### 11. Definition of the Ancient Parish of Harborne

The Ancient Parish comprises the parishes of

- St Boniface, Quinton Road West
- St Albans, Smethwick
- St Chad, Smethwick
- St Mary, Smethwick
- St Matthew, Smethwick
- St Michaels and All Angels, Smethwick
- St Peter, Harborne
- St Faith and St Laurence, Harborne
- St John, Harborne
- St Stephen, Smethwick
- St Paul, West Smethwick
- Old Church, Smethwick and
- Holy Trinity, Smethwick.