



Headrow

LETTINGS POLICY

HOW WE LET OUR HOMES

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HEADROW LTD

LETTINGS POLICY : HOW WE LET OUR HOMES

Introduction

Headrow Ltd own and manage a diverse range of properties across West, North Yorkshire and the East Riding. This document explains the policies that are used to let those properties in a way that meets the housing needs of a range of customers. It ensures the sustainability of the developments and communities in which properties are located, is fair, transparent and accountable and recognises the cultural diversity of the areas in which we operate.

In order that we may best use our homes to meet our customers' diverse and varied housing requirements we use three distinct lettings systems. These are the **Choice System**, which seeks to maximise customers' opportunity to choose a property from those we have available, the **Needs System**, which is based on customers' quantifiable housing needs and Headrow **Plus**, this is properties that have been built without any public subsidy. Details of the policies and procedures of each of the three systems are described later.

Regardless of which of the systems is used to let a property we are committed to being fair and treating people equally while taking account of the wishes of both our existing and future customers. The policies and procedures outlined in the first part of this document therefore cover all our properties whether they are included in Choice, Needs or Headrow Plus.

Who We House

Headrow seeks to provide homes for a diverse range of customers. Certain properties may have specific letting criteria for the individuals or household we are seeking to house in them. These will be detailed in the **Scheme Marketing Plan** and will be made clear in the marketing material and the application process.

Scheme Marketing Plans

Every Headrow scheme has a Scheme Marketing Plan. The plan sets out information about the scheme, its target customer groups, the system by which it is let, the marketing methods and the target characteristics of its population. Specifically the plans include the following:

Information

- Property types, sizes and numbers, disabled adaptations
- Location description
- Rent levels
- Services offered
- Performance information
 - Turnover and demand
 - Maintenance
 - Anti-social behaviour
- Customer involvement
- Current households composition
 - Ethnicity
 - Child density
 - Economic activity
 - Supported tenancies
- Local services and facilities
- Local support agencies
- Any other relevant information

New customers

- Target household composition
 - Ethnicity (% target minimum BM&E households)
 - Child density (% target maximum)
 - Economic activity (% target minimum households with people in employment)
 - Supported tenancies (% target maximum of tenancies requiring additional support)
- Target customer groups
- Letting system for scheme
- Marketing methods
- Local Authority nominations

The targets for household composition across each scheme are used to determine a preferred household profile for each vacancy as and when it arises.

Headrow's Operations Committee approves the Scheme Marketing Plans annually. The plans are also presented to the existing residents of each scheme at their annual Business Meetings and to the relevant local authority for consideration.

Who We Will Not House

Although Headrow seeks to make our homes available to as many people and households as possible there are applicants who we are not normally able to assist. These are:

1. People under the age of 16
2. People of 16 & 17 years of age who cannot provide a rent guarantor, and who do not have an adequate support package
3. People with no right to live permanently in the United Kingdom
4. People who provide false information during their application process
5. People who are unable to provide two references
6. People who are employed by Headrow
7. People who are related to a member the Board, Committee or Staff

Applications may also be rejected on the following grounds:

8. There is evidence that the applicant, members of their household, or future visitors to the property, may cause a nuisance to local residents. i.e. through noise, harassment, lack of cleanliness, drug dealing or use and/or any other form of anti-social behaviour.
9. There are rent or mortgage arrears outstanding from an existing or previous landlord or mortgage lender, which have arisen for reasons other than genuine hardship.
10. There is evidence that the applicant will be unable to manage and sustain an independent tenancy with no acceptable support package in place for the applicant.
11. There is evidence that the applicant, members of their household, or future visitors to the property, may cause damage to the property or be a threat to Headrow's staff.

Where an applicant is rejected on any of the above grounds they will be written to confirming the position and the reason. All rejections will also be presented to the Operations Committee.

Equality and Diversity

Headrow recognises that it operates in an area of great cultural diversity. We will seek to ensure that our homes are let in a way that treats people equally regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion or beliefs. We will seek to ensure that we do not discriminate personally or institutionally. Specifically, we will, use the Scheme Marketing Plans to set targets for levels of B&ME households living in our homes, that is consistent with the wider local population.

Headrow will give priority in the letting of properties that have been designated or adapted for use by people with a disability to applicants with needs that can best be met by those properties. Any such properties will be identified in the scheme marketing plans.

Transfer applications

Transfer applications will be considered in the same way as those from other customers, using the appropriate letting system for the property/ies being sought. References will not be required for transfer applications. However, acceptance of transfer applications will be dependent on satisfactory maintenance of the existing property and adherence to the tenancy agreement.

Existing customers will not be accepted for transfer where their tenancy is less than 1 year old, or where any rent arrears exist. However, we will consider a transfer application of less than a year if the customer is experiencing domestic abuse, racial harassment or other forms of violence. The customer should fill in the request for Priority Status. However, priority may be given to those existing customers whose current accommodation is of high demand if more than one transfer applicant applies for housing and matches the essential and preferred criteria, the tenant who has had the tenancy longest will be offered the property.

Mutual Exchange

A mutual exchange is a series of assignments between tenants of public sector landlords e.g. Local Authority and Registered Social Landlords (RSL's). Most mutual exchanges are between 2 tenants, but can be between a number of tenants.

All secure and assured tenants have the right to mutual exchange, with the consent of their landlord. After a mutual exchange each tenant gets the other tenants tenancy, and any obligations and rights associated with that tenancy.

If you wish to carry out a mutual exchange with a tenant from Headrow Ltd, a local authority or another Registered Social Landlord (RSL), please contact this office for more information.

Appeals

If a customer feels that their application has been rejected, mal-administered or treated unfairly, they may request that the Operations Committee consider their case. They will have the right to make a written submission to the Committee, but not to attend the meeting. Oral hearings will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances. Appeals to the Operations Committee must be made within 28 days of the incident causing the complaint. The decision of the Operations Committee will be communicated to the application within seven days of the meeting.

If the customer remains dissatisfied with the decision they may make appeal to the Independent Housing Ombudsman (N.B. Headrow Plus properties not included in scheme).

Local authority nominations

Headrow will actively seek to fulfil its role in assisting its partner local authorities in meeting their identified housing needs. The details of any nomination arrangements with local authorities will be set out in the Scheme Marketing Plan for each development. These will vary from scheme to scheme according to its nature, funding and the authority's needs.

The Association has a duty to offer at least 50% of all publicly funded rented properties, which have become vacant to people from the Council's waiting list.

If you are registered with the Council you may qualify for a nomination by them to Headrow. This may increase your chances of being rehoused.

Re-housing Ex-Offenders

Headrow has a separate Allocations Policy for re-housing ex-offenders. The policy states Headrow will screen all applications where it is indicated on the form the applicant has been convicted of a criminal offence, which is regarded as unspent at the time of application.

Customer Service Standards

The General Service Standards included in Headrow's published customer Service Standards apply to our lettings policies and procedures. The standards specifically related to allocations and transfers are as follows:

We will:

- Send you an application or transfer form, and the information you need to complete it, within 3 days of your request.
- Write to you within 10 working days of receiving your completed application or transfer form and let you know if we are able to help you.
- Offer advice and help with completing the application or transfer form.
- Tell you if your application or transfer has not been accepted, give the reasons why and give you the right to appeal.
- Confirm an offer of housing in writing, tell you what the rent will be and who to contact to view the property.
- Publish a fair Lettings Policy, which recognises the needs of both individual applicants and the wider community.

Review

On a 6 monthly basis applicants on our waiting list will be written to asking if they still want to be rehoused and if their circumstances are the same. This is to ensure your details held on our system are accurate, and that you are offered a property at the earliest opportunity. If you do not reply to this letter within 28 days we will presume that you no longer wish to be rehoused and your application will be cancelled.

Change in Circumstances

Applicants should advise Headrow of any change in their circumstances. This would include any changes in address or contact details, household make-up, income, and/or changes in areas or developments requested. Please note that an offer of housing may be withdrawn if we do not have the correct information.

Declining Offers

Customers may decline offers of accommodation at no detriment to their application. Customers will, however, be interviewed to ascertain the suitability of Headrow's properties for their housing requirements if three offers of housing are rejected. If, following this interview, it is felt that we will be unable to assist the customer their application will be removed from the waiting list.

THE CHOICE SYSTEM

Introduction

- Headrow Ltd's Choice Based Lettings Policy seeks to maximise customers opportunities to choose a property from those we have available.

Registration

- Applicants will be required to complete a registration form, giving basic information about themselves and the type of property they require. A letter will be issued, given a number and date of registration.

Applying for Advertised Properties

- Registered applicants can then apply for vacant properties; registration can take place at the same time as applying for an advertised property.
- Advertising techniques will vary from scheme to scheme and will be detailed in the **scheme marketing plans**.
- Registered applicants will be sent a property detail sheet when a vacancy occurs, this gives information about the property and the essential and preferred criteria needed to obtain the property.
- Applicants can bid for more than one property at any time.

Priority Status

- Where customers are experiencing certain exceptional circumstances they will be given Priority Status for a period of 3 or 6 months. (Further details of this are attached). A request for this status must be made in writing to the Operations Manager.

Assessment of interested applicants

- After the closing date a list will be compiled of all applicants who have shown an interest in the property and their details will be compared with the essential and preferred criteria and the information contained in the scheme marketing plans. The applicant who best matches the criteria will be invited to view the property. If 1 or more applicant meets the criteria, the decision will be made on who registered first.

Offer of tenancy

- If the customer would like the property, they will be asked to provide more detailed information about their personal circumstances and references.

Feedback to customers

- Once a property has been let, all applicants that applied for that property will be written to, and advised of the date of registration of the new tenant and the number of responses received to the advert.

Priority Status

Where customers are experiencing certain exceptional circumstances they can be awarded priority status.

The circumstances in which priority status will be awarded are as follows

1) **Statutory Homeless**

Where people have been accepted as statutory homeless by their Local Authority. Priority Status will be awarded for a 3-month period.

Please note; A letter from the Local Authority, confirming this status, must be submitted.

2) **Severe Medical Need**

Where there is an immediate, severe, medical need that will be alleviated by a change in housing circumstances. Priority status will be awarded for a 6-month period.

Please note; A letter from a consultant specialist must be submitted to confirm this situation and give a recommendation of the features of housing required.

3) **Severe Harassment**

Where people are suffering severe harassment such that there is an immediate threat to their well-being. Priority status will be awarded for a 6-month period.

4) **Domestic Violence**

Details of the case and any documentary evidence
Priority status will be awarded for a 6 month period.

Please note; A letter from the Police verifying this must be submitted.

It is the customer's responsibility to obtain the supporting documentation required when seeking priority status with the Association.

When a customer has priority status they will be invited to view any property they apply for, subject to meeting the advertised criteria for that property, ahead of any other applicants.

In the unlikely event of two, or more, customer's with priority status applying for a property the invitation to view will go to the person who has held the priority status the longest.

The customer will keep priority status for period as indicated above.

To apply for priority status, please write to the Operations Manager with the appropriate supporting documentation as indicated above.

THE NEEDS SYSTEM

Introduction

Headrow Ltd's Needs Lettings System prioritises access to properties on the basis of an assessment of the applicants housing needs. This is done using a simple points system that awards points based on assessed housing needs in the following areas:

- Homelessness
- Housing Conditions
- Social Issues
- Medical Issues

Properties are allocated to the applicant with the highest points that meets the household profile as determined by the Scheme Marketing Plan.

Homelessness Points

- Roofless and Statutory Homeless 300 points

This means statutory homeless with no fixed abode (as determined by the Local Authority). No further points can be added except for medical needs.

- Potentially Roofless 200 points

A legally binding notice must have been served on the applicant to qualify under this section. No further points can be added except for medical needs.

Housing Condition Points

- Overcrowding
 - One bedroom short of adequate 50 points
 - Each additional bedroom short of adequate 50 points

Adequately housed is defined as a separate bedroom for:

- Each couple living together
- A partner requiring a separate bedroom for medical reasons

- Accommodation too large
 - More than one bedroom in excess 50 points

- Lacking amenities 200 points

Points for lacking amenities will be awarded if any one, or more, of the following amenities are not present in the applicants' current accommodation:

- Access to self contained kitchen facilities
- Bath or shower
- Inside toilet
- Hot water supply

Elderly people or people with a disability who are unable to use existing amenities should be treated as lacking those amenities.

- Sharing amenities 50 points

Points for sharing amenities will be awarded if any one, or more, of the following amenities are shared with members of another household:

- Kitchen facilities
- Bath or shower
- Inside toilet
- Hot water supply
- Heating

- Property condition

- Declared unfit by Environmental Health 200 points
- Needing major repairs or severely dilapidated 50 points
- Poor condition 25 points

- Living at height

- Elderly and/or incapacitated people living above or below ground floor without the use of a lift 50 points

Social Issue Points

- Substantiated external harassment that cannot be resolved except by moving home 150 points
- Substantiated domestic violence and/or sexual abuse that cannot be resolved except by moving home 150 points
- Relationship with partner has broken down and they cannot reasonably be expected to continue to co-habit 150 points
- Cannot afford accommodation 100 points
- To give/receive support to/from relatives (must be substantiated by other party) 100 points
- To take up employment (must be substantiated by employer) 100 points

Medical Points

- Current accommodation causes inconvenience or is problematic to medical condition 100 points
- Severe medical condition that will not be alleviated without moving home 200 points

Medical points will be determined by a medical questionnaire presented to, and completed by, the applicants' doctor. Where an allocation is made to an applicant who has medical points the likely improvements from living in the offered accommodation must be demonstrable.

The Awarding of Points

All points are awarded to applicants based on the information contained in the application forms, and, if appropriate, on the information in the medical questionnaire. A senior officer or manager will verify the award of points. Applicants will be advised of their points total and given an indication of the range of points totals at which offers are being made, and the frequency that they are being made, at the developments they have requested.

Offers of Accommodation

All applicants will be held on waiting lists for the developments they have requested. Offers of accommodation will be made to the highest pointed applicant for any development who best meets the household profile as determined by the Scheme Marketing Plan. This means that **the offer is not necessarily made to the highest pointed applicant.**

Where two, or more, applicants share a points total and both match the required household profile the offer will be made to the applicant who registered for housing first.

Offers of accommodation will be made in writing with a time limit of three days in which to respond. If there is no reply within this time limit, or the applicant declines the offer, then the property will be offered to the next highest pointed applicant who best meets the household profile as determined by the Scheme Marketing Plan.

HEADROW PLUS

Introduction

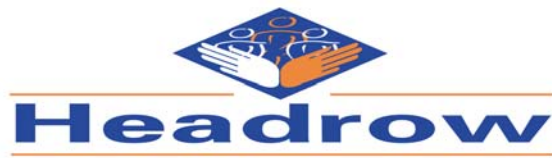
- Headrow Plus is used for schemes that were developed without any form of public subsidy. The letting of these properties is usually carried out by Headrow staff, but occasionally an external letting agent is used.

Marketing

- The marketing of properties will be carried out by Headrow staff, and will be in accordance with the **scheme-marketing plan**. Marketing will be carried out as and when properties become available, and is likely to comprise of advertising in the local press, as a minimum.
- Viewing of properties will normally be carried out by Headrow staff
- Once a prospective tenant has been identified, an application form will need to be completed. Headrow will arrange for the taking up of personal, employment and banking references. We will also ask for proof of i.d. this will preferably be a passport or similar document e.g driving license.
- Proof of Identification.
- Subject to satisfactory references the application will be accepted.

Property Offer

- The offer of the tenancy will then be confirmed to the applicant.
- Headrow staff will carry out the sign up and letting of the property, and arrange for the signing of Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreements by the new tenant. Wherever possible we will ask for the bond at the viewing to secure the property.
- At the sign up, we will also accept payment of one months rent and a bond (usually one months rent from the new tenant. The new tenant is issued with a payment mandate for completion and return. An information pack, including contact details, for Headrow's services will also be issued to the new tenant.



PRIORITY STATUS REQUEST FORM

Date of request: _____

Application No: _____

Reason for household request:

Statutory Homeless

A letter from the Local Authority, confirming statutory homeless status.
Priority Status will be awarded for a 3 month period.

Severe Medical Need

A letter from a consultant specialist to confirm applicant has an immediate, severe, medical need that will be alleviated by a change in housing circumstances.
Priority status will be awarded for a 6 month period.

Severe Harassment/Social Services/ Doctor/ Vulnerable Witness

A letter from the Police verifying severe harassment as such that there is a immediate threat to their well being.
Priority status will be awarded for a 6 month period.

Domestic Violence

Details of the case and any documentary evidence
Priority status will be awarded for a 6 month period.

Comments: _____

Approved: Yes No

Reason: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____