

# TRHA Lettings and Allocations Policy

## 1.0 VISION

**'To establish lettings processes and procedures that addresses housing need and aspiration and promotes sustainable communities in a fair and reasonable approach.'**

## 2.0 Corporate Aim and Risk Mapping

The Lettings and Allocations Policy supports two of our Corporate Aims. These are detailed below together with the appropriate reference to the Risk Map.

**Aim 1 –** *'To be a customer focused organisation which provides homes and related services that recognise the changing social and demographic environment and the diverse needs of the North East. We will do this by continually improving our service delivery and encouraging a listening and learning culture.'* (Risk map reference 3)

**Aim 2 –** *'To create and sustain vibrant and thriving communities by actively promoting inclusion, choice and opportunity for all customers and by challenging racism and all forms of discrimination so people can take pride in their communities.'* (Risk map reference 2)

## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 To promote ease of access to apply and be considered for TRHA accommodation.
- 3.2 To ensure that the lettings process fairly and reasonably takes into consideration and addresses issues of individual housing need.
- 3.3 To ensure that the lettings strategy, processes & procedures promote community and scheme sustainability.
- 3.4 To encourage a 'choice based letting' approach to the operation of the letting process and procedure.
- 3.5 To formulate letting processes and procedures that are simple to implement and easy for the customer to understand.
- 3.6 To implement letting policies and procedures that are transparent and accountable and to ensure that they comply with legislative and regulatory requirements.
- 3.7 To provide satisfactory support, advice and assistance for all customers to access, move in and to sustain a TRHA tenancy.
- 3.8 To provide a quality home and estate environment for all customers living in TRHA accommodation.

- 3.9 To provide an excellent customer service that addresses individual requirements throughout the letting process from allocation to moving in.
- 3.10 To seek to ensure equality of access and treatment for all in the operation of the lettings and allocation policy and procedure irrespective of ethnic origin, colour, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation.
- 3.11 To ensure the effective and efficient letting of empty properties in order to minimise losses and maximise income for service improvements.
- 3.12 To ensure an effective monitoring system to assess the impact and performance of the lettings policy and processes in meeting the needs, objectives and aspirations of customers and TRHA.

#### **4.0 APPLICATION QUALIFICATION**

- 4.1 Applications will be accepted from anyone aged 16 years or over.

Applications from persons aged under 18 will be considered if: -

- the application is backed by a suitable support package.
- reliable organisation/ person acts as rent guarantor for the period until the tenant attains the age of 18.

- 4.2 Applications will be accepted from individuals or families who have care & support needs, which could include physical disability, learning disability or a mental health problem.

- 4.3 Where unsatisfactory references are received, applicants must be advised of the issue, stating the reason why and notifying them of the right of appeal.

- 4.4 Applications will not be accepted from Board Members, staff or their close relatives without the approval of the Board of Management. Close relatives are defined as:

- Spouse of the person, or persons living together as husband and wife
- Parent, child, brother or sister of the person.

- 4.5 **Guarantors** - TRHA will not ask applicants to provide a guarantor except where the applicant is a minor.

- 4.6 **Deposits** - Deposits will not be taken from applicants for housing.

- 4.7 **Local connection** - TRHA will not ask for a local connection to a prerequisite of any application. Exceptions to this rule include: -

- Where S.106 agreements apply

- If a local lettings policy is in place
- Where local authorities nominate applicants only with a local connection

4.8 **Blanket Bans** – Applicants should not be excluded from the waiting list or refused accommodation if their circumstances ‘fit’ into a defined category. Every case must be judged on its merits and efforts made to resolve any possible ineligibility.

4.9 **Poaching Agreements** – TRHA will not enter into any agreements with other landlords and authorities that restricts the choice of customers in applying or securing alternative accommodation (e.g. not allowing transfers between neighbouring estates). Exceptional arrangements whereby landlords could agree not to re-house applicants from near-by estates can only be agreed by the Board on the basis of sustaining local communities that experience exceptional turnover of accommodation.

4.10 **UK Residency** - Applicants that do not have UK residency, unless referred under the Immigration and Asylum Seekers Act 1999, will not be eligible to make an application for accommodation.

## 5.0 PRIORITISING OF APPLICATIONS

The establishment of three grades will be introduced, with those in grade 3 having the greatest need for accommodation. The grade will relate to the main reason why an applicant has applied for accommodation. This reason will relate to the following categories of housing need:-

5.1 **Grades - Note the categories of need in grades are not listed in any order of priority**

### Grade 3. In urgent need of accommodation

GRADE3	Description
HOMELESS	Household is being legally evicted from its present accommodation or legal contract is expiring and is not to be renewed. <b>or</b> Applicant has no accommodation and living on the street
HARASSMENT	Household needs to leave accommodation or is homeless due to severe harassment such as racial, threats or serious neighbour disputes (involving reasonable consideration of individual circumstances). <b>or</b> Applicant is fleeing domestic or other violence and cannot reasonably remain in their present accommodation.

GRADE3 (cont'd)	Description
SERIOUS MEDICAL NEED	Applicant is unable to live in their present home because of a medical/disability issue and is residing in a home/hospital. <b>or</b>

	Applicant's medical condition/quality of life would be significantly improved by a move to more appropriate accommodation. <b>or</b> Applicant is living in their present home but the surroundings/ environment presents substantial risk to the individual because of their disability/ medical need.
OVERCROWDED	Living in overcrowded accommodation where an applicant over the age of 10 is sharing a bedroom with a household member of the opposite sex (where they are not partners) <b>or</b> Where there is more than 2 applicants of the same sex sharing a bedroom <b>or</b> Where it is reasonable to consider the applicant(s) overcrowded due to their personal circumstances
CLOSER TO WORK	Applicant needs to move closer to work in order to take up a job offer, maintain employment or improve the convenience of travel to the work.
POOR CONDITION	The physical conditions of the household's accommodation is inadequate e.g. disrepair such as dampness; lack of facilities such as hot water.

## Grade 2. Need to improve their present living arrangements

GRADE 2	Description
SHARING FACILITIES	Separate households are sharing kitchen/bathroom facilities with another household.
LIVING WITH FRIENDS	Applicant is living with indirect family (e.g. not a partner or parent) or with friends and requires their own accommodation.
PROVIDE/RECEIVE MEDICAL SUPPORT	Applicant requires the help/provide assistance to another family member with medical duties such dispensing medication, lifting, bathing etc.
INSECURE /HOSTEL TENANCY	Applicant is living in accommodation where they have a short term/insecure tenancy or licence to occupy the premises.
AFFORDABILITY PROBLEM	Applicant is seeking re-housing owing to financial difficulties, which is threatening the loss of their accommodation.
SPLIT FAMILY	Household is split between two or more locations and can only be reconciled through the provision of a new home.
STUDENT	Applicant requires accommodation near to a learning institution in order to pursue a course of study.
RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN	Applicant is leaving/left their accommodation due to the breakdown of the relationship with a partner.
TRANSFER	Existing TRHA tenant requests a move to alternative TRHA accommodation and does not have a greater need

## Grade 1. In need of alternative accommodation

GRADE 1	Description
INDEPENDENCE	Applicant wants to be re-housed independently where there is no overt pressure to leave their current accommodation.
MEDICAL NEED	Applicant experiences a medical condition or disability
NUISANCE	Applicant wants to move as they are suffering from nuisance (not harassment) in their present accommodation (involving reasonable consideration of individual circumstances).
UNDEROCCUPIED	Applicant is living in accommodation with 2 or more unused bedrooms.
COMMUNITY SUPPORT	Applicant requires the help or to provide assistance to another family member with duties such as shopping or assisting with childcare.
ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION	Applicant is in need of alternative accommodation to improve the quality of their life e.g. household with children living in a high-rise block, to be near local school or to move to a better location. <b>OR</b> Applicant has a minor need that does not relate to the other categories

## 6.0 REFERENCES

- 6.1 All applicants during the assessment stage must be able to provide suitable references or provide a satisfactory assessment of their capability to manage and sustain a tenancy without causing disruption and problems for the existing community. TRHA is committed to sustaining and promoting successful communities and will seek to ensure that disruption is not caused to existing tenants.

The following issues will be taken into consideration when assessing the applicant's ability to successfully manage a tenancy: -

- 6.2 **Criminal Activity** - The activity must have relevance upon the ability of an applicant to conduct their tenancy in a reasonable manner or be likely to pose a risk to the wider community. Issues to be considered include: -

- using a tenancy for storing stolen goods
- storing or dealing in drugs
- assault on a neighbour, visitor or representative of a landlord
- burglary

Offence of the above nature will not be taken into account if they are older than **3 years or if it is a spent conviction**.

### 6.2 Schedule 1 Offenders

A final decision to re-house a Schedule 1 offender will not be made unless a suitable and adequate support package is in place. A risk assessment will be sought from the Probation service and the decision to allocate accommodation will only be made with the agreement of the TRHA Executive Management Team. Individual cases will be reported to Board as and when necessary.

Consideration will be given to: -

- the support package of the applicant
- the availability of suitable accommodation
- risk of re-offending
- location of possible accommodation for re-housing
- type of offence and the risks upon a local community

There will be **no time limits for the length of time that has elapsed for an applicant currently registered as a Schedule 1 offender unless it is a spent conviction**.

- 6.3 **Anti-social Behaviour**- A history of anti-social behaviour (ASB), for which possession action has been taken or might reasonably have been taken. The definition of ASB is "conduct which is capable of causing nuisance

or annoyance to any person and which directly or indirectly relates to or affects the housing management functions of a relevant landlord.”

Issues to be taken into consideration include:

- Harassment
- noise nuisance & intimidation occasioned by the applicant, a member of the family, a person normally resident with the applicant or frequent visitor to the premises.
- Racial harassment

ASB of the above nature will not be taken into account if it is older than **2 years and the household has conducted a tenancy satisfactorily in the intervening period.**

- 6.4 **Damage to property** - Damage to property must be supported with evidence from the former landlord to confirm the extent of the damage. Instances of damage to be taken into account include:

- For which possession action has been taken or might reasonably have been taken
- Void repair/cleaning costs over and above a reasonable level have been incurred, and no attempt has been made to repay.

Damage to property of the above nature will not be taken into account if it is older than **2 years.**

- 6.5 **Serious rent arrears** - Where applicants have current or former rent arrears of over £250 they will be allowed to register an application, but no offer of accommodation will be made until they have demonstrated that they have entered into and complied with a repayment agreement with the former landlord for at least a six-month period.

Rent Arrears of the above nature will not be taken into account if it is older than **3 years and the applicant has demonstrated the ability to manage a tenancy in the meantime without serious arrears arising.**

Existing TRHA tenants will be allowed to register an application but will not be granted a transfer unless their rent account is clear. Where a TRHA tenant needs to be transferred because of an ‘emergency situation’ (e.g. Violence) then this shall normally be granted with the agreement of the Operations Director.

TRHA will not take into consideration debts arising from non-housing sources (e.g. Council tax; hire purchase)

- 6.6 **Violence** - A history of violence or threats against the Associations staff, other tenants or against officers of another landlord.

Violence of the above nature will not be taken into account if it is older than **2 years.**

## 6.7 Unsatisfactory References

6.7.1 The decision not to allocate an applicant accommodation due to unsatisfactory references must be backed by substantiated evidence from a reliable source(s). The decision must be reasonable, and based only on the ability of the applicant to manage a tenancy. A reliable source will include:-

A former landlord	The probation service
The police	The courts
Social Services	A local authority
A care agency	Local resident(s)

6.7.2 The Team Leader – Neighbourhood Services shall be authorised to deny the allocation of accommodation of an application on the above grounds and time limits.

6.7.3 Any person who has unsatisfactory references who is suspended from the waiting list will be notified in writing of the reason why. That person has the right to appeal against non-qualification through the Associations housing appeals procedure. Additionally they should be advised to approach housing advice agencies for further advice to resolve their housing issues.

## 6.8 Suspensions

6.8.1 Normally applicants will be suspended (removed from the active waiting list) from the waiting list for a one-year basis and asked to re-apply after this period. Suspension will be based upon one or more of the criteria set out in section 6.2 – 6.6, which refers to references.

6.8.2 During the suspension they will be expected to demonstrate an ability to manage a tenancy/behaviour in a reasonable manner. TRHA will only use suspensions in exceptional circumstances where there is sufficient evidence to reasonably question their ability to sustain a tenancy without causing problems for the local community.

6.8.3 Suspensions of up to two years will only be imposed in the most severe of circumstances where the applicant(s) has a history of serious misconduct or criminal activity.

6.8.4 The applicant must be notified in writing of the duration and reason for the suspension.  
The applicant will have the right of appeal to the Operations Director. Suspensions will be noted on the Comino diary and reported to Board as part of the annual lettings report.

6.9 **Credit Checks** - TRHA will not undertake checks on the credit status of applicants.

## 7.0 APPEALS PROCESS

- 7.1 An applicant who is being denied accommodation due to unsatisfactory references, grade awarded or any customer who considers that their application is being handled or assessed unfairly has a right to appeal at any stage of the application and letting process to the Operations Director. This appeal can be made by telephone or in writing and TRHA will offer assistance (e.g. interpreters, language line etc where required).
- 7.2 The Lettings appeal will be registered on the TRHA Complaints system (note appeal does not have to be in writing) and referred to the Operations Director for consideration. The Director has 10 working days to respond to the complaint in writing, setting out the reasons for the decision. If the Director has been involved in the original decision then this matter shall be referred to another Director for determination.
- 7.3 If the Applicant is still unhappy then the issue will be referred to the Chief Executive for consideration. He has 10 working days to consider the appeal and set his decision out in writing.
- 7.4 If the Chief Executive is unable to satisfy the applicant then the matter will be referred to the Appeals Committee for consideration. The panel will meet within 10 working days and respond in writing, setting out the reasons for their decision. The applicant will be able to attend and have representation at the appeal if they wish.
- 7.5 The Appeals Panel will be constituted from three members of the Board, preferably to include a Tenant Board member.
- 7.6 The applicant throughout the appeals process will have the right to be represented by a third party. This could include representation from a friend, relative, social worker, housing advice worker, citizen's advice officer etc. TRHA will aid the applicant in accessing representation should they request this.
- 7.7 The applicant at each stage of the appeals process will receive written notification of the decision and the reasons for it. Additionally they have the right to access information pertaining to their application under the Data Protection Act and this shall be supplied free of charge. The applicant will be informed of any information withheld under the act and the reason for this.
- 7.8 All those determining the appeal process will consider the following aspects of the complaint.
- Has established policy and procedure been followed in relation to the service provided to the customer?
  - Is the evidence provided relevant, credible and fair?

- Has the application of policy and procedure been implemented harshly, unfairly or in a discriminatory way against the best interests of the customer?
- Will the customer suffer excessive hardship if the appeal is not determined in their favour?
- If the appeal is upheld will this pose a risk to the community and existing TRHA customers? (Note: Support packages should be taken into consideration)
- Can the customer reasonably conduct and manage a TRHA tenancy? (Note: Support packages should be taken into consideration)

7.9 All customers going through the appeal process have the right to refer their appeal to the Housing Association Ombudsman.

#### 7.10 Appeals Monitoring

7.10.1 Appeals will be monitored through the complaints database, which will collect brief personal details, the nature of the appeal; the decisions made and the reasons for the decision.

7.10.2 Additionally ethnicity will be monitored to ensure that BME customers are not unfairly discriminated and over-represented in terms of appeals.

7.10.3 Monitoring information will be presented to the Board on an annual basis as part of the review of Lettings and Allocations. The Board will review the existing procedure taking into account information provided from the appeals process.

#### 7.11 Appeals Promotion

7.11.1 The Appeals process will be promoted in the following ways: -

- All correspondence relating to the decision about an application
- Through the Homefinder leaflet
- Through the tenants newsletter
- Through the TRHA web site

### 8.0 ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

8.1 Applications received will be initially graded on the basis of information provided. The application will initially be assessed upon receipt, when the greatest need of the applicant according to their medical, social, or housing circumstances, will be determined. Reference to the grading descriptions above will be used to categorise applications.

- 8.2 The grading will be recorded on the application form, along with a brief description of the need that correlates to the awarded grade. The applicant shall be notified of the grading in writing and will have a right of appeal through the Associations appeal procedure, if they are dissatisfied.
- 8.3 Each applicant will be interviewed by an Officer prior to any allocation of accommodation. The Officer will review the applicants grading according to their current circumstances, and can recommend a re-grading with the approval of the Team Leader. The applicant will be notified in writing of the re-grading, and will have a right to appeal through the Associations appeals procedure, if dissatisfied.
- 8.4 Reference checks will be undertaken by the officer to determine whether the applicant is able to manage and sustain a tenancy without causing disruption and problems for the existing community and comply with tenancy regulations.
- 8.5 Applicants may be required to provide supporting information from a reliable source to substantiate their need. The Officer will have the discretion to request the information if it is relevant to the application. This supporting information may include health, probation, welfare or nuisance/harassment details. Officers should endeavour, at all times, to minimise the need for the provision of such information.
- 8.6 Grading effectiveness will be considered as part of the monthly audit of lettings by the Team Leader. Issues of unsuitable grades will be identified and addressed with individual officers.
- 8.7 Officers should ensure that all decisions with regard to application assessment are clearly documented and demonstrate fairness and justification for decisions.

## **9.0 ALLOCATION OF ACCOMMODATION**

- 9.1 When allocating a void property, the officer will compile a short-list of potential applicants, where possible. The officer will contact an appropriate number of applicants to determine whether they are interested in the vacancy. This shortlisting will save time and resources, as firm offers of accommodation will not be made to applicants who have not already expressed a wish to be considered for a particular vacancy.
- 9.2 Officers will offer accommodation to the applicant in the highest grade first, then work down through the grades if further offers are necessary. The officer will make a note against any applicant overlooked for accommodation, clearly stating the reason why. This will be checked as part of the monthly audit process.
- 9.3 Where 4 weeks have elapsed since the allocation process was initiated and no letting has been achieved through the multi-letter process, the

property can be offered to any applicant at the discretion of the Neighbourhood Services Manager. The Neighbourhood Services Manager would need to be satisfied that multi-offer letters have been sent to all applicants on the waiting list that they should reasonably be sent to, and that the property has been advertised in local media and retail outlets. Also that a to-let board has been placed on the exterior of the property.

- 9.3.1 A note detailing the fact that this process has been invoked should be included in the lettings paperwork and held on the tenancy file for audit purposes.
- 9.4 If there is more than one applicant on the waiting list for a vacancy with the same grade, then the officer will determine who to make the offer to by data order (preference to oldest first). Exceptional circumstances that over-ride the data order rule can be agreed by the Manager/Director: this will entail written justification of the decision being noted with the waiting list documentation.
- 9.5 TRHA through its asset management strategy may decide that some schemes require local letting policies in order to ensure sustainable communities. Direction will be provided to officers, with the authorisation of Board, on the criteria for letting in these areas (e.g. preferences to households without children; non benefit dependent; mature young persons). The officer will still continue to work through the grades until they identify an applicant matching the local letting criteria. Where there is more than one 'suitable applicant' then the data order rule will apply.
- 9.6 Offers of accommodation will be audited by the Team Leader – Customer Services on a monthly basis to ensure that Officers are adhering to the guidelines. Additionally the Manager will undertake a letting and termination audit annually to satisfy that the policy is being implemented effectively. The procedure will also be audited by the Associations own independent auditors.
- 9.7 Offers of accommodation should attempt to reflect the size of the vacancy, so that units are matched according to family and accommodation size/and or type. Therefore elderly accommodation should be allocated to older applicants; family accommodation to families and couples; flats to single persons and couples. Where there is no demand from a particular vacancy from an appropriate applicant type, then the Officer should attempt to fill the vacancy with a suitable applicant. This should only be done with the permission of the supervisor, who should take into account the existing local community and their lifestyles.
- 9.8 Specifically adapted accommodation should be allocated in co-operation with local authorities housing and social services and other care agencies (where appropriate).

## **10.0 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

- 10.1 Three Rivers Housing Group is committed to developing sustainable communities, which residents are proud to live in. The Asset Management Strategy identifies schemes on an annual basis that are 'at risk' due to high turnover, high cost or market instability.
- 10.2 As a measure to deal with this instability the Asset Management Group may recommend to Board that local letting criteria is adopted in these schemes. The Board will agree the local letting criteria and this shall be adopted as part of the letting procedure. Local lettings will be reviewed annually through the asset management policy.
- 10.3 In setting local lettings policies the following issues will be considered age, one or two parent households, income levels, child density and re-housing route. Such an approach will assist in achieving more stable economic and social communities, which foster an environment of mutual support between residents both within the development and within the wider community.

## **11.0 NOMINATIONS**

- 11.1 The Association will continue to meet its obligations under s213 of the Housing Act 1996 to co-operate with and assist local authorities, within reason, in fulfilling their duties towards the homeless.
- 11.2 The Association will negotiate nomination agreements on new schemes with the appropriate local authority. This agreement will be adhered to, subject to sufficient nominations being received from the local authority who meet the allocation criteria of the Association.
- 11.3 The Association will endeavour to allocate 50% of its re-let voids to applicants nominated by local authorities. This will comply with s170 of the Housing Act 1996 to co-operate with local authorities, within reason, in housing those on the statutory register. This is subject to sufficient nominations being received from the local authority who meet the allocation criteria of the Association.
- 11.4 All nominations received by the Association will be assessed and prioritised by Officers according to the allocation policy. The Association will continue to review existing nomination procedures with local authorities to ensure that the process is streamlined and effective.

## **12.0 MOBILITY AND EXCHANGES**

- 12.1 The Association will participate in both national and local mobility and exchange schemes. Qualifying applicants on mobility schemes will be ranked on the waiting list according to their need for re-housing.

- 12.2 Tenants have the right to exchange with other tenants of the Association, local authority or another registered social landlord, providing they have written consent to do so.  
Exchanges will be granted as long as the tenants have clear rent accounts; the accommodation is suitable to meet the requirements of the individuals concerned and comply with tenancy regulations.
- 12.3 TRHA will aid persons wanting to mutually exchange through advertising their available accommodation through local offices and the interactive web site.

### **13.0 TRANSFERS**

- 13.1 Applications for transfer will be accepted from existing tenants providing that they have held a tenancy for longer than twelve months; have a clear rent account and have complied with the conditions of tenancy. The twelve month guideline will help stabilise some communities which suffer from high turnover.
- 13.2 Discretion can be granted by the Manager to enable the registration of a transfer application that does not meet these criteria, if there are exceptional circumstances pertaining to the application e.g. disability, violence, severe harassment. A record of the decision should be noted in the applicants file or on the housing management computer system.
- 13.3 Officers can allocate an empty property to a transfer applicant with a lower grade or waiting time if the resultant void will then be allocated to an applicant with a higher grade or longer waiting time. This should be noted on the waiting list to justify the letting.
- 13.4 TRHA tenants who are under-occupying large, popular accommodation can be granted a priority transfer into smaller accommodation if this releases their home for a larger family. This should be done with the authority of the Team Leader and a note made on the waiting list to justify the letting for audit purposes.

### **14.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

- 14.1 Three Rivers is a publicly funded body, we want to demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity by ensuring that no individual or group of applicants will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of gender, marital status, disability, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation age or religious belief.
- 14.2 We aim to ensure that the diversity of our tenants reflects the communities where we work across the North East.

We will do this by:

- 14.2.1 - producing information in easily readable forms for people who may not use English as a first language and for people who experience difficulties with reading.
- 14.2.2 - placing information about the lettings policy in community based facilities.
- 14.2.3 - providing regular and consistent Equality and Diversity Training for all our staff who are responsible for letting properties.
- 14.2.4 - monitoring applications and lettings by different Black and Minority Ethnic origin against annual targets.
- 14.2.5 - conducting Equality audits of the lettings policy and procedure.
- 14.2.6 - collecting and assessing feedback from tenants to compare the experiences and views of different households and communities.

## 15.0 CHOICE

TRHA is committed to providing as much choice as possible for housing applicants in choosing a new home. It also seeks to follow Government guidance on establishing a choice based letting system as far as practicable, whilst still retaining a need based approach. TRHA will implement the following principles within its letting and allocation policy.

- 15.1 **Choice should be available to new applicants and existing tenants wishing to move** - Three Rivers allocation policy integrates new and transfer applications on the same waiting list. Additionally applicants can express as many choices for accommodation that they wish; there is no limit to the number of schemes they can express an interest in.
- 15.2 **There should be no penalty for those who do not want a property on offer** Three Rivers allocation policy does not penalise applicants for refusing an offer of accommodation.
- 15.3 **Councils and Associations should consider pooling properties and making them available to people outside their own local area** - Three Rivers allocation policy promotes working with local authorities through effective nomination procedures. Additionally TRHA offers empty properties to applicants from outside the local area and there is no residency requirement to make an application.
- 15.4 **Choice should be well informed and people should be aware of what housing is available and what their chances are of getting it.** – Through existing advertising and increased marketing of accommodation TRHA will make people aware of available accommodation. Guidance to applicants is provided through leaflets, interactive web site, written receipt of application, assessment and personal contact.

15.5 **The Government is opposed to points based allocations systems & advocates a broad brush banding system.** TRHA places applicants with similar levels of need in the same band. Additionally TRHA complies with Government proposals for three possible bands.

- People with an urgent need for social housing
- Those in non urgent need of social housing
- Those with no particular need for it

## 16.0 RECORDS

16.1 The application form, along with any notes, correspondence or forms will be kept in an applicants file. Information with regard to the application will also be entered onto the Groups Housing Management Computer system (Comino) for the purpose of considering the applicant for accommodation.

16.2 Information with regard to the progress of letting an empty property, including offers and refusals will be recorded on the Comino void monitoring system

16.3 All information held or disclosed by the Association in relation to their housing application will be subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Applicants have the right to see personal information held on the computer or on manual systems. (Please see TRHA Data Protection Policy for further detail).

16.4 TRHA will be involved in the CORE system that records details of applicants personal circumstances for statistical and research reasons.

## 17.0 MONITORING

Monitoring of the allocations policy will be undertaken through the following processes.

- Monthly auditing of lettings by Customer Services Team Leader.
- Annual audit by Manager.
- Report to Board on yearly CORE data.
- Annual letting report to Board.
- Review of the allocations policy every two years
- Comprehensive Tenant Survey every two years
- Quarterly Performance Indicators
- Internal audit.
- BME monitoring of applications, new tenancies and appeals

## 18.0 TRANSPARENCY

- 18.1 TRHA is committed to managing a transparent allocations and letting process that enables applicants sufficient access to information to determine whether the Group is fair in dealing with their application.
- 18.2 TRHA it is committed to a simple to access appeal system that will fairly and reasonably investigate any issues of concern or complaint.
- 18.3 Specifically TRHA will seek to ensure transparency through the following measures: -
  - 8.3.1 All applicants will receive a written confirmation of their grade based on their principal reason for requiring accommodation.
  - 18.3.2 All applicants will receive written confirmation of their housing application details so that they can check to ensure that they are a fair and accurate representation of their situation.
  - 18.3.3 All applicants will receive a copy of the Housing Corporation Applicants Charter
  - 18.3.4 All applicants will receive access to a copy of the Homefinder leaflet that sets out how to apply for accommodation; where accommodation is located and how it is allocated.
  - 18.3.5 TRHA will publish its allocation policy on its interactive web site. Paper copies will also be provided free of charge, on request.
  - 18.3.6 TRHA lettings will be audited by the team Leader on a monthly basis and appropriate records kept.
  - 18.3.7 TRHA lettings will be audited annually by the Manager to satisfy that the system is operating effectively and fairly.
  - 18.3.8 The lettings process will be audited as part of TRHA internal/external audit programme.
  - 18.3.9 TRHA will operate and monitor an appeals system where applicants can report their concerns. This system will be monitored and reported to the Board through the Groups complaint board reports.
  - 18.3.10 TRHA will advertise its lettings appeal process through its letters, information leaflets and web site.
  - 18.3.12 TRHA will only consider information with regard to a reference when it has direct relevance to the ability of an applicant to manage a tenancy in a reasonable manner.
  - 18.3.13 TRHA will notify any applicant of an unsatisfactory reference as soon as the information is received and provide them with the opportunity to challenge the information.

18.3.14 TRHA will provide a monthly report on lettings for audit purposes, which will set out the address of an empty property as well as the grade and application date of the person it was allocated to. This will enable applicants to challenge lettings if they have been allocated to someone who is in a lower grade, or an equivalent grade with a shorter waiting time. The file is held by the Team Leader Customer Services.

## **19.0 HOUSING SUPPORT**

19.1 TRHA will endeavour to provide assistance to access support in helping applicants' access and maintain a tenancy. This will be provided on an individual basis to ensure flexibility in delivering a support service either directly or through links with other care and statutory agencies. Examples of support offered by TRHA include:

- Tenant Incentive Grants - to help applicants move into accommodation
- Tenant Support Grants - to enable tenants to maintain their tenancy without excessive hardship
- Benefits Advice – Advice and assistance on claiming housing and other state benefits & credits
- Independent Living Service – Advice and assistance specifically for the elderly, disabled and vulnerable to maintain or access independent living initiatives.
- Supported Housing Service – Advice and assistance to individuals (e.g. young people, victims of violence) to access and maintain TRHA accommodation.
- New Tenant Visit – Every new tenant shall receive a visit from an officer within one month of moving into their new home to ensure that they have settled into their community and to address any issues that have arisen.

19.2 TRHA will not grant a tenancy to a vulnerable applicant who is unable to manage a tenancy without additional support only in the following circumstances:

19.2.1 The Group, despite every effort, is unable to ensure that the appropriate support is available.

19.2.1 The level of support required would seriously undermine the Groups ability to support other residents in a scheme.

19.3 Vulnerable residents who are not granted a tenancy on this basis should be advised in writing setting out the reasons for a refusal of offer and advising them of their right to appeal.

## **20.0 Responsibility**

20.1 The Head of Housing Services will ensure that all allocations and lettings information is available in line with the intentions of this policy

and to provide tenants and applicants with timely and accurate information.

- 20.2 Team Leader Customer Services will notify in writing the duration and reason of any applications that have been suspended.
- 20.3 Operations Director to undertake the appeals of any suspended applicants.
- 20.4 The Chief Executive responsible for any referred appeals where the applicant is not satisfied with the Operations Directors response.
- 20.5 Team Leader Customer Service to audit lettings on a monthly basis.
- 20.6 Neighbourhood Services Manager to audit lettings on an annual basis.

#### **21.0 REVISION OF THE WAITING LIST**

- 21.1 A revision of the waiting list will be undertaken at least once a year. Applicants will be requested to return a completed application form and/or a return slip.
- 21.2 Additionally one-off revisions can be implemented throughout the year to review specific waiting lists that are long and appear to be populated by applicants who do not actively require accommodation.
- 21.3 Applicants failing to respond to a review will be automatically removed from the waiting list.
- 21.4 Applicants who respond late to a revision (within six months) can have their application reinstated from the original application date.
- 21.5 Support will be offered to those applicants who find difficulty in responding to written correspondence.