

Policy

Title: **Assisted Furniture Scheme**

Date of Issue: March 2011

Issue Number: 1.0

Date of next review: March 2014

Author: Pat Hansen

Service Area applies to: Allocations and Housing Services

Approved By: Lead Member for Housing Services

Electronic Storage: Sharelt / Published Documents

Translations available on request by phoning 0151 510 5000 or via email at info@haltonhousing.org

यदि आपनि एई तथा अन्या भाषा में पढे चान, अहले नरा कले 0151 510 5000 नयल फोन करुन।

यह सूचना यदि आपको किसी अन्य भाषा में चाहिये तो कृपया नंबर 0151 510 5000 पर फोन करें।

یہ معلومات اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان میں چاہیے تو براڈ مہربانی نمبر 0151 510 5000 پر فون کریں۔

如果你需要其他語文版本的本資訊，請致電 0151 510 5000

Jeśli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać powyższe informacje w innym języku prosimy zadzwonić pod numer 0151 510 5000

This document is also available in Braille, large print and on tape



Halton
Housing Trust
Delivering quality and excellence for all

CONTENTS PAGE

Introduction	3
Aims / Objectives	3
Scope	3
Policy Statement	3
Responsibility	5
Service Standards	5
Performance Measures / Monitoring	5
Consultation Arrangements	5
Benchmark Analysis	6
Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance	6
Kloes Affected	6
Diversity Considerations	6
Links to Strategies, Procedures and Associated Documents	7
Business Impact	7

Introduction

The Trust appreciates that for a certain number of applicants who may be vulnerable because of their economic or personal circumstances etc; the offer of an unfurnished tenancy under the Trust's allocations policy may not in itself be enough to meet all their housing needs. In such cases a major obstacle often arises because they lack the means to provide basic furniture and other household items. This in turn may cast doubt even at this early stage on their ability to sustain their tenancy in the longer term.

This policy sets out the principles and ways upon which the Trust would look to provide assistance to those customers who qualify under the scheme with a package that would help them to furnish their new accommodation.

Aims / Objectives

The Trust will always look at ways in which it can positively contribute to the sustainability of the communities it works within. The provision of a furniture package scheme to vulnerable customers which can assist them in setting up and establishing their new tenancy is seen as contributing to this general aim.

One of the main objectives in running this scheme is to give qualifying customers practical support and encourage the best possible start to establishing their tenancy with the Trust

Scope

This policy will primarily apply to employees working in the Lettings section for its implementation, but will also include liaison with employees in the Welfare Benefit Support section and the Area Housing Teams.

Policy Statement

Potential applicants for the scheme will be identified by the Lettings Officers at the initial housing application stage, either from information they have provided on their housing application form or at their housing options interview. The Lettings Officers will be looking for 'markers' or characteristics that indicate the applicant's vulnerability in some way that could be helped by the scheme. For example, this could be because of their low income, and/or the personal circumstances that gave rise to them applying to the Trust for housing. Such markers would point to possible issues/problems that the applicant may face in setting up their tenancy properly.

Eligibility

The Trust will look to assist with the provision of a furniture package to certain customers on the following basis:

- The scheme will only be open to applicants off the Trust's waiting list, who meet certain criteria.
- Applications for assistance under this scheme will be assessed on the premise that there is a significant risk that the applicant will potentially not be able to sustain the tenancy in the longer term without such assistance being provided at the start of their tenancy.
- The applicant does not qualify under any other scheme that could provide them with furniture etc to begin their tenancy with the Trust – for example, Social Fund monies available from the DWP.

Review of Circumstances

- There will often be a time lag between the customer's initial application and acceptance under this scheme and them receiving an offer of accommodation from the Trust. If necessary, the Trust reserves the right to review the customer's circumstances at the time of offer to ensure that they are still eligible for assistance under the scheme.
- Conversely, some customers, who may have been told initially that they don't qualify for assistance under the scheme, may have had a change in circumstances that now makes them eligible. At offer stage, the Trust may also review such cases where this is felt to be appropriate.

Provision

- Any furniture package provided will be gifted by the Trust to the qualifying applicant at the start of their tenancy; i.e. it will be given to them on a one-off basis. There will be no obligation for the Trust to replace any of the items provided in the original package in the future.
- Anyone benefitting from a furniture package under this scheme will be required to sign an addendum to the Trust's standard tenancy agreement when they sign up for their tenancy.
- Any furniture package will be provided by means of a 'voucher' to the value of a fixed amount which can be redeemed by the applicant for furniture, white goods etc at outlets approved and working in partnership with the Trust to facilitate the scheme.
- The Trust reserves the right to specify that certain essential items are to be provided as part of each individual award.

Funding

- An overall budget figure for the year will be determined and monitored by an appropriate officer of the Trust. The provision of the scheme will be primarily demand-led by qualifying applicants and will be subject to annual budget limitations.

- So that as many potential applicants can benefit under the scheme as possible, each award will be limited to a fixed amount per applicant. This fixed amount may be varied from time to time.

More details on the actual workings of the scheme and what can be provided etc are contained in the Procedure Guide which has been developed to accompany this policy.

Responsibility

The Director of Customer Services will ultimately be responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

Responsibility for the day to day implementation of the policy will lie with the Housing Options Manager.

Service Standards

The main service standard that applies to this policy is on behalf of the customer; in that once they had made their choices under the scheme, it is expected that the items will be provided within 28 days.

Performance Measures / Monitoring

It is not envisaged that any specific performance measure will be required regarding this scheme, as it is demand-led by qualifying applicants. However, details of the number of applicants benefitting under the scheme will be kept for the usual financial and governance requirements, as well as for developmental purposes.

The Housing Options Manager will be responsible for monitoring the overall budget that funds the scheme.

Consultation arrangements

This policy has been considered by the Customer Forum and their views have been incorporated into the policy.

In addition, in Autumn 2010 a survey was carried out with all new prospective customers for a short period to gauge interest in the scheme. All interviewees were in favour of the scheme and their views influenced the development of the policy.

Benchmark Analysis

Account has been taken of the National Housing Federation publication “Win-win: How partnership working delivers the goods for residents, housing associations and furniture re-use organisations” in developing this policy.

Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance

Certain elements of the Tenancy Standard set out in the Tenant Services Authority (TSA)’s Regulatory Framework from April 2010 will apply to this policy.

Under the Allocations section of this standard there is a specific expectation (2.2) which states that: *‘Registered providers shall minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting. When doing this, they shall take into account the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties.’*

In addition, under the Tenure section of this standard there is a specific expectation (3.1) which states that: *‘Registered providers shall publish clear and accessible policies which outline their approach to tenancy management. They shall develop and provide services that will support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The approach should set out how registered providers will make sure that the home continues to be occupied by the tenant they let the home to.’*

There is no legislation that currently affects this policy.

KLOEs affected

The Audit Commission’s Housing Inspectorate Landlord Services KLOE on Tenancy and Estate Management poses the question: *‘How promptly are empty properties identified and re-let and is this in accordance with published procedures and service standards?’*

An excellent performing organisation is said to have *‘customer focused lettings practices, with accompanied viewings and follow-up visits to new tenants. Identifies vulnerable services users at the start of their tenancy and ensures that appropriate support is available.’*

Diversity Considerations

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on this policy in June 2010. The assessment concluded that the policy was not directly or indirectly discriminatory, and that it did increase equality of opportunity for those benefiting under the scheme.

Links to Strategies, Procedures and Associated Documents

Financial Inclusion Strategy
Meeting Housing Needs and Access to Housing Policy
Empty Property Management Policy
Assisted Furniture Scheme Procedural Note

Business Impact

There are cost implications for the Trust regarding the way in which any furniture package is gifted to qualifying applicants. However, it is envisaged that this can be offset by tenancies being sustained to a greater extent in the longer term, with subsequent savings being accrued through lower turnover rates, and associated lower relet costs and rent loss.

From the customer's point of view, the effective implementation of this policy to those who qualify under the scheme will undoubtedly provide them with a better service and add to their overall experience when being rehoused by the Trust.