
UNDER OCCUPANCY POLICY

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1. REVISION/REVIEW SHEET

Issue	Brief Description of Reason for Change	Document Owner	Date Issued
Issue 0	New policy	ECHarris	09/2013
Issue 1	Review of policy Issue 0 - 09/13	Mari Pritchard	01/2018

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1. The purpose of this policy is to set out how Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) deals with the issue of under-occupancy in its social rented properties to maximise the use of its housing stock and to assist tenants who would benefit from downsizing.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1. This policy applies to tenants under- occupying social rented properties owned by CCG.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1. It will be the responsibility of the Director of Customers and Communities to ensure that this policy is applied effectively and that staff are trained appropriately in the procedures associated with this policy.

5. POLICY DETAIL

- 5.1. This policy will explain how CCG aims to deal with under-occupancy in its properties to make best use of its stock and assist tenants to downsize.
- 5.2. Under occupation can be defined as living in a home that has more bedrooms than the household requires. A long-standing definition used has been the bedroom standard which stipulates that no one should have to share a bedroom unless they are an adult couple; two children under 16 of the same sex; two children under 10 years old regardless of sex.
- 5.3. CCG has tenants who are living in larger 3 and 4 bedroomed family homes which are often:
- inappropriate for their needs
 - more costly to run
 - more difficult to clean and manage
 - expensive to adapt
- 5.4. CCG wants its tenants to live in a home which meets their needs, is affordable and allows them to remain part of their community.
- 5.5. There is also a need to work with and support working age tenants who qualify for welfare benefits who are affected by the 'bedroom tax' – which is the social sector size criteria where tenants of working age claiming housing benefit and under-occupying their homes by one or more bedrooms will have their housing benefit reduced by 14% for one spare bedroom and 25% for two spare rooms.
- 5.6. CCG frontline staff will ensure that tenants are aware of the opportunities provided by this policy and sign post to the Allocations Service
- 5.7. CCG will provide tenants with a Size Matters Fact Sheet (ALLI01) when dealing with enquiries on downsizing

5.8. The proposals for dealing with the issue of under-occupancy are:

- Incentives to downsizing
- Positive promotion
- Targeted communication for under occupying tenants
- Adaptations Policy (WHQSpol03)
- Common Housing Allocation Policy (ALLpol01) – partnership working with Gwynedd Council and other Registered Social Landlords
- Assignment of Tenancy and Mutual Exchange Policy (TSpol03)

5.9. In response to the Welfare Reform changes the Allocations Policy was reviewed to give Housing Management Factor points which includes addressing the under-occupation of property. These points are only awarded to existing tenants of Housing Association members of the Partnership. This is designed to enable CCG and members of the Partnership to facilitate transfers of existing tenants, where the transfer would provide a benefit to the landlord and tenant.

5.10. CCG is also registered as part of a national exchange scheme (HomeSwapper), and will participate in other exchange registers as appropriate in order to facilitate and assist CCG tenants to find suitable tenants to exchange with.

5.11. Incentives to Downsizing

5.11.1. An under-occupancy grant allowance of up to £500 is available to assist tenants to move to suitable accommodation

5.11.2. Tenants who either need to downsize due to reductions in welfare benefits or due to the property being inappropriate to their needs will in addition to the grant be assisted to move to homes where the rent is more affordable and /or where the property is more suitable to their needs.

5.11.3. Should the tenant meet the necessary criteria a Tenancy Support Officer will assist the tenant during the move.

5.11.4. CCG officers must complete the under-occupancy grant application form (ALLf78) with the tenant and agree on the incentive package and costs before the move is confirmed

5.12. Positive promotion

5.12.1. The policy requires the support of staff in order to be successful. It is the responsibility of front line staff to ensure that customers are fully aware of the opportunities provided by this policy and to sign post those customers to the Allocations service

5.13. Targeted communication for under occupying tenants

5.13.1. CCG will undertake targeted communication for under-occupying tenants when suitable alternative accommodation is available and as part of an ongoing initiative to release under-occupied accommodation.

5.14. Adaptations Policy (WHQSpol03)

5.14.1. The Adaptations Policy sets out an approach whereby any customers, who are refused major adaptations due to the suitability and or practicality of the property, are offered support and advice from CCG to identify more suitable accommodation. Those customers who are under-occupying their home will be entitled to the benefits identified in 5.11 above.

5.15. Eligibility for downsizing

5.15.1. Tenants should have a clear rent account or have made continuous repayments as agreed with CCG for an agreed period in respect of any arrears in order to be eligible to move to another property. However, discretion will be used where the debt is due to a gap in welfare benefits and/or where downsizing will create a more affordable tenancy and make better use of stock.

5.15.2. CCG will not agree to a move if by doing so you will become overcrowded in your new property

5.15.3. CCG will not agree to a move if creating a new tenancy in a smaller property would be unaffordable.

6. REVIEW OF DECISION

6.1. CCG recognises the right to request a review of any decision relating to this policy. Any such review will be dealt with under the CCpol01 – Complaints and Concerns Policy.

6.2. CCG will ensure that any decisions relevant to this policy are reasonable and comply with relevant policy and legislation

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

7.1. In applying this policy, CCG will be committed to treating all enquiries fairly and with regard to its Equality and Diversity policy.

7.2. CCG will ensure that this service is fully accessible to everyone who is eligible or has a legitimate interest in downsizing property

8. REFERENCES

8.1. The following publications and legislation have been referenced during the drafting of this policy:

- Matrimonial Causes Act 1973
- Family Law Act 1996
- Civil Partnership Act 2004

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- Housing Act 1985
 - Housing Act 1988
 - Housing Act 1996
 - Welfare Reform Act 2012

9. RECORDS

- 9.1. CCpol01 – Complaints and Concerns Policy.
- 9.2. WHQSpol03 -Adaptations Policy
- 9.3. Size Matters Fact Sheet
- 9.4. ALLpol01 – Common Housing Allocation Policy

10. REVIEW

- 10.1. This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if changes to legislation, best practice or other relevant CCG policies make it necessary.