

UNDER OCCUPANCY POLICY

CONTENTS

REVISION/REVIEW SHEET

PURPOSE

SCOPE

RESPONSIBILITIES

POLICY DETAIL

RISK FACTOR

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

REFERENCES

RECORDS

REVIEW

1. REVISION/REVIEW SHEET

Issue	Brief Description of Reason for Change	Document Owner	Date Issued

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1. The purpose of this policy is to set out how Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) is seeking to address the issue of under occupancy in its properties.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1. This policy applies to all tenants and prospective tenants of properties owned by CCG.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

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

5. POLICY DETAIL

- 5.1. CCG aims to provide high quality and appropriate accommodation for all of its customers. There is a shortage of family homes in Gwynedd and it is important that CCG manages its homes as assets and ensures that the right households are in the right homes
- 5.2. This area has a growing elderly population who are living in larger 3 and 4 bedroomed family homes which are often:-
- inappropriate for their needs
 - more costly to run
 - expensive to adapt
 - in poor condition as they have still not benefitted from the WHQS improvement programme
 - adapted for a disabled customer. These homes will need costly works to re-adapt the home to meet the needs of a family following the end of the current tenancy
- 5.3. There is also a need to work with working age tenants who qualify for welfare benefits and who have one or more spare bedrooms to match them to a property where they can afford the rent. The Housing Benefit element of the Unified Credit payment will be reduced by 14% for one spare bedroom and 24% for two spare bedrooms.
- 5.4. Therefore, there is a real challenge to provide appropriate, suitable accommodation to all of CCG customers. There are a number of proposals aimed at tackling the issue of under occupancy and they are set out below:-
- Incentives to downsizing
 - Positive promotion

- The adaptations policy

5.5. Incentives to Downsizing

- 5.6. If appropriate, a range of options will be offered to Tenants to assist them to move including a named officer to manage the move, an incentive payment to cover moving and packing where necessary, assistance with decorating, waiver of warden service charge, reconnection of utilities and a moving allowance up to a value of £500. If necessary, CCG will work with the tenant to provide portable equipment and any minor adaptations that may assist them.
- 5.7. Officers must ensure the tenant has agreed the incentive package in writing before the move is confirmed.
- 5.8. A major incentive to all tenants who downsize is that the accommodation that they move into, will meet the WHQS standard in line with the WHQS Voids Policy approved by Board in June 2011. Any necessary adaptations will also be made to meet the needs of the incoming tenant subject to the Adaptations Policy.
- 5.9. Tenants who need to downsize due to reductions in welfare benefits will be supported to move to homes where their rent is more affordable.
- 5.10. CCG will co-ordinate its activities with other organisations to ensure that the needs of its Tenants are met and to make the best use of its assets. This may include planning and co-ordinating allocations policies across local landlords, facilitating mutual exchanges and chains of moves.

5.11. Positive promotion

- 5.12. The policy requires the support of all staff in order to be successful. Therefore, the Communications team will take responsibility for producing regular articles and leaflets promoting the benefits of the policy. Further, it will be the responsibility of all front line, customer-facing staff to ensure that customers are fully aware of the opportunities provided by this policy and to sign post those customers to the allocations team.

5.13. The Adaptations Policy

- 5.14. In recent years, the Council and CCG have been installing adaptations for disabled customers in homes based simply on a request for the works. This has meant that:-
 - CCG has customers often living in unsuitable accommodation
 - The budget is unsustainable to meet the growing demand.
 - Properties are under occupied
 - Recently installed, costly adaptations are removed on change of tenancy. This can happen shortly after installation

- Customers are often living in unsuitable accommodation which is difficult to manage, costly to run etc
- The adaptations prolong the tenancy of customers who would be better suited to more appropriate accommodation
- There is a growing waiting list of families for family housing

5.15. Therefore, the Adaptations Policy sets out a new approach whereby any customers, who are under occupying their home and struggling to manage without major adaptations, are signposted to the allocations team to identify more suitable accommodation. Those customers will be entitled to the benefits identified in 5.4 above.

5.16. Eligibility for downsizing

- 5.17. 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. Discretion will be used where the debt is due to a gap in welfare benefits.
- 5.18. Tenants will have their current property inspected and will need to complete any work to the property that is required prior to the move going ahead
- 5.19. CCG will not agree a move if members of the household or visitors to the home have been involved in antisocial behaviour
- 5.20. CCG will not agree a move if by doing so you will become overcrowded in your new property

6. RISK FACTOR

- 6.1. The risk that CCG does not approve the policy is that there is no strategic approach to managing assets and the allocations process. This will lead to customers living in unsuitable accommodation and a growing demand for family-sized accommodation.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 7.1. CCG Cyf. recognises the needs of a diverse population and always acts within the scope of its own Equality and Diversity Policy.

8. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

- 8.1. For the purposes of this policy the definition of an adaptation is an alteration or addition to any aspect of a dwelling to make it easier or safer for use by a disabled person.
- 8.2. Under-occupancy is defined where there is a minimum of 1 bedroom that is not required by the household where the Bedroom Standard is based on the ages and composition of the family. A notional number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with its composition by age, sex and marital status and relationships of family members. A separate bedroom is allocated to each:
- married or cohabiting couple

-
- adult aged 21 years or more
 - pair of adolescents aged ten to 20 years of the same sex
 - pair of children aged under ten years regardless of sex
 - Any unpaired person aged ten to 20 years is paired, if possible, with a child aged under ten years of the same sex or, if that is not possible, given a separate bedroom. The same applies to any unpaired child aged less than ten years.

8.3. Major adaptations are defined as either a single adaptation or a package of adaptations that meet more complex needs and require specification by an Occupational Therapist. A package of major adaptations may include some minor adaptations as well.

9. REFERENCES

- 9.1. Adaptations policy
- 9.2. Allocations policy

10. RECORDS

11. REVIEW

- 11.1. This policy will be reviewed every two years.