



LETTINGS & ALLOCATIONS POLICY

General Needs Housing

May 2016

Welwyn Garden City Housing Association Ltd.

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Lettings & Allocations Policy - General Needs Housing

This policy has been written in a question and answer format from the applicant's point of view. All applicants should read the policy to check if they are eligible for housing by Welwyn Garden City Housing Association.

Welwyn Garden City Housing Association (WGCHA) does not hold its own Housing Register for **general needs** housing and receives nominations for our properties from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council or Stevenage Borough Council, depending on the location of the property.

This means that you will have to be registered on the Welwyn Hatfield Housing Needs Register, or with Stevenage Borough Council, and be nominated to WGCHA when it has a vacancy.

We work closely with both Councils to ensure that our general needs properties are allocated to applicants who are in the greatest housing need. Regard has been given to the Councils' own allocations policies in deciding who we will consider for housing. Information about how to register with each Council is provided further in this document.

Who can apply?

Anyone who is over the age of 16 years can apply for WGCHA's general needs accommodation and must join the Council's register. Applications will not be considered if you:

- a) do not have a recognised housing need
- b) are subject to immigration control
- c) do not have a valid local connection
- d) do not have the right to rent

What is the Right to Rent?

Right to rent came into force on 1 February 2016. As a landlord, WGCHA is required to check the status of any prospective tenants and other adult occupiers. We have to ensure that you have a right to be in the UK. We cannot allow an adult to occupy one of our properties under a residential tenancy unless you are one of the following:

- a British citizen
- a European Union (EU) citizen
- a European Economic Area (EEA) citizen
- a Swiss national
- you have been given a specific right to rent in the UK

Original documents proving you meet one of the above criteria will have to be provided before you are offered a tenancy. The list of acceptable documents required from you will be provided by the Housing Officer prior to any tenancy being granted. More information about the Right to Rent checks can be found on the Government website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-rent-document-checks-a-user-guide>

Are there other restrictions?

Yes, as well as the above, WGCHA will only consider a nomination from the Council if you:

- a) are under the age of 18 years and have a suitable and acceptable guarantor;
- b) do not have sufficient financial means to resolve your own housing needs. We will only consider an applicant with a gross annual income of less than £30,000 (including investment income) if they are a single person, or less than £40,000 if a couple. (Assessment of income will ignore Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Carers Allowance);
- c) have less than a total of £30,000 in assets (includes capital, investments, equity in a property etc);
- d) have a clear and identifiable link to the borough of Welwyn, Hatfield and Stevenage through work, residency or education (of no less than 5 years out of the past 8 years).

Furthermore, WGCHA will not consider applications from anyone where there is proven evidence that their behaviour (or a member of their household's behaviour) is unacceptable and serious enough to make him/her unsuitable as a tenant (e.g. rent arrears, harassment, nuisance/anti-social behaviour). Unacceptable behaviour also includes providing false or misleading information.

Only in exceptional circumstances can WGCHA consider an application from a committee or board member, an employee/former employee, or anyone related to an employee or member of Welwyn Garden City Housing Association.

How do I apply for housing?

As WGCHA does not hold its own Housing Register for general needs housing, you will have to be registered on the Welwyn Hatfield Housing Needs Register or with Stevenage Borough Council and be nominated to WGCHA when it has a vacancy.

Their contact details are:

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Herts AL8 6AE Tel: 01707 357000

Stevenage Borough Council

Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage SG1 1HN Tel:01438 242242

To join the Welwyn Hatfield Housing Needs Register you need to register online with **Herts Choice Homes**. Herts Choice Homes is a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme for Council and Housing Association properties across five authorities in Hertfordshire, including Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

You can use Herts Choice Homes if:

- you are an existing tenant seeking a transfer
- you are a homeseeker already on the Housing Register
- you are applying for the first time.

You will be placed in a band (determined by your priority for housing) according to your housing need. Eligible applicants can then select and bid for properties they are interested in. Further information about the Herts Choice Homes website can be found at www.hertschoicetohomes.org.uk.

To join the Stevenage Borough Council Housing Needs Register you should apply directly to the Council and complete their application form. It can also be downloaded from their website at www.stevenage.gov.uk.

Once your application form has been accepted by Stevenage Borough Council, they too will place you in a band based on your current circumstances. Stevenage Borough Council also has a choice based lettings system which enables us to let our vacant homes through them.

Once your application with Stevenage Borough Council has been validated, you can log on to the **HOME4U** website at www.home4u.org.uk and bid for any of our available properties advertised on the website. If you are successful in bidding for the property, your details will be forwarded to WGCHA in the form of a nomination.

What circumstances are taken into account when deciding who is housed?

Full details of the criteria are on the Welwyn Hatfield and Stevenage Borough Councils' websites, but below are the main categories considered when deciding who has the greatest housing need:

- Applicants who have urgent/significant medical conditions to require housing
- Applicants who are living in overcrowded conditions
- Applicants living in a property not adaptable to meet the needs of the household
- Applicants living in a property in a serious state of disrepair/unsanitary conditions
- A statutorily homeless household or a household at risk of being homeless
- Applicants who are current or former armed personnel
- Applicants whose social or financial circumstances mean they have difficulty in securing accommodation
- Applicants leaving care

What happens when WGCHA receives a nomination from the Council?

If you are successful in bidding for the property, your details will be forwarded to WGCHA in the form of a nomination.

We will then write to you enclosing our Lettings and Allocations Policy and ask that you complete an application form and a financial review form. On receipt of the form, and subject to your application meeting WGCHA's criteria, a letter is sent with an appointment date for an interview. This usually takes place in your current home. If you do not live within the Welwyn Hatfield area, alternative arrangements to interview you would be

made. During the interview you will have an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on any query you may have. It also gives our Housing Officer an opportunity to discuss your circumstances and application with you.

What happens to the application once I have been visited?

Information gathered at the interview will enable WGCHA to assess whether you are eligible for consideration. This is not automatically guaranteed. If we determine you are not eligible for one of our properties, WGCHA will inform the Council and write to you as to why.

If you are eligible the Housing Officer will inform the Council and send you a written offer giving details of the property, including the amount of rent and service charges payable. At this point arrangements would also be made for you to view the property in question.

Do you take account of medical conditions / disability?

Yes. If you have a medical condition/disability that would be aided, or better managed, as a result of moving to another property, WGCHA will request supporting evidence from the appropriate medical or social care professionals (GP/ consultant/ social worker/ occupational therapist). They would be asked to report to WGCHA as to how the medical condition/disability would be improved/aided as a result of a property move.

What size property would I be offered?

WGCHA has a limited number of properties for general needs housing. They range from one bedroom flats to three bedroom houses. You will only be considered for a property that is right for your household and that complies with the lettings agreement we have with the respective Council.

The table below shows the size and type of home that is normally considered. The number and size of the bedrooms will determine the family composition.

Property size	Family size and composition
One bedroom flat	Single person and couples
Two bedroom flat	Couples, families with 1 or 2 children
Two bedroom bungalows (older persons)	Single person or couples over the age of 60, or 55 with a disability
Two bedroom houses	Families with 1 or 2 children or people downsizing to a smaller property
Three bedroom houses	Families with 2, 3 or 4 children

Note: A family can be a single person or a couple, with one child or more living with them. This includes expectant mothers.

In certain circumstances, WGCHA will agree to a property being under-occupied. For example, when a tenant gives up a larger size Council property, such as a 3 or 4-bedroom house to downsize to a smaller property to make best use of the affordable housing properties in the area.

What happens if I refuse an offer?

If the Council has nominated you to WGCHA, but you refuse the offer of accommodation, it will be the Council's decision to determine what happens to your application. However, WGCHA will not accept any further nominations from the Council if you have already refused three offers of our accommodation.

Can WGCHA refuse the nomination from the Council?

Yes, WGCHA has the right to refuse the nomination if we consider you fall within one of the conditions detailed in our list of restrictions. In most cases, WGCHA will not refuse the nomination, as the Council would have made all the necessary checks before nominating you. However, further investigations during our interview process may bring to light issues that were not known beforehand.

Can I appeal against any of your decisions?

If WGCHA has refused your nomination and you are unhappy about the decision, or you feel we have not dealt with your application appropriately, you have the right to appeal against the decision. Appeals, which must be made within 28 days of being notified of a decision, must be in writing and addressed to:

Head of Housing & Property Services
Welwyn Garden City Housing Association Limited
10 Parkway
Welwyn Garden City
Herts AL8 6HG

The Head of Housing & Property Services will undertake a review of your application and respond to your appeal within 28 days. If you are dissatisfied with the Head of Housing & Property Services' decision, you may appeal to the Association's Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive will consider the grounds of the appeal and notify you of their decision, in writing, within 28 days.

If you are unhappy with the Chief Executive's decision, you are entitled to appeal to the Housing Ombudsman Service at:

Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych
London
WC2B 4HN
Telephone: 0300 111 3000
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Can I access the information you have regarding my housing application?

You are entitled to check that WGCHA has accurately recorded the information you have provided. If you wish to do so, please contact WGCHA to arrange a mutually convenient time. We must advise you that certain third party information provided, i.e. by a doctor/social worker, etc. will be removed prior to inspection. Such information can only be made available with the author's written consent.

Does WGCHA operate an Equality and Diversity Policy?

WGCHA is committed to ensuring that all people have equal access to our services. We are intent on providing equality to all applicants regardless of sex, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. WGCHA has a published Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan, which is available on request.

What is your transfer policy if I am already one of your tenants?

WGCHA endeavors to house people in suitable accommodation, but recognises that circumstances change. It is with this in mind that consideration is given to a request for a transfer from an existing tenant. We recognise the need for good management of our housing stock and will look at a transfer request without the need for you to apply to the Council. We call this a Management Transfer. It is only used in limited situations and where there is an actual vacancy to transfer to.

For example, where an application from an existing tenant is received and they are vacating a larger property for a smaller one (e.g. moving from 2 bed to 1 bed), or moving from a more popular property to a less popular property (e.g. from a ground floor flat to an upper floor).

Applications will also be considered where harassment is shown to be a factor or where there is a neighbour dispute, which has proven impossible to reconcile. Moving nearer to family support or friends and or to a property more suitable to meet a resident's needs, through disability or the need for care and support, will also always be taken into account.

Are mutual exchanges allowed?

A mutual exchange involves the tenants of Registered Social Landlords and/or Local Authorities swapping homes and tenancies. If you find someone who you would like to exchange properties with, you will have to apply to both landlords. WGCHA would not unreasonably refuse permission, but will assess whether the person wishing to move to your property is eligible. For more details please contact WGCHA or go to the HomeSwapper website at www.homeswapper.co.uk. WGCHA is a member of the HomeSwapper scheme.

Are pets allowed?

New applicants do not have an automatic right to keep pets. A decision on whether you can bring your existing pet with you into your new home will be based on the size, type and temperament of the animal, as well as the size, type and location of the property. In most situations WGCHA will only allow a pet if you live in a house and have direct access to a garden. We do not allow any pets in flats.

Owners will be asked to re-home their animals should complaints be received or if their pet's behavior causes a nuisance.

Would you need to ask other organisations for information about me?

It may be necessary to obtain additional information to decide if you are eligible to be housed in one of our properties. For example, we will always request information from

your previous landlord (if applicable) about the way you conducted your tenancy and obtain clarification on whether you have outstanding rent arrears.

WGCHA may require additional medical information from a GP, Social Worker, Occupational Therapist or a Hospital Consultant, to ensure our accommodation suits your needs.

What happens if I provide false information?

If WGCHA discovers that there has been any wilful misrepresentation, the application will be cancelled immediately and the nomination rejected. If misrepresentation leads to an applicant being rehoused ahead of other applicants who are in greater housing need, legal action will be taken to recover possession of the property.

This policy was reviewed by the Board of WGCHA

at its meeting on 4th May 2016