



## INNISFREE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

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Allocations Policy

# ALLOCATIONS POLICY

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# ALLOCATIONS POLICY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Innisfree Housing Association (Innisfree) was established in May 1985 to provide housing for homeless and inadequately housed Irish people in London.
- 1.2. The Association has over 575 homes and operates predominantly in North and North West London, with the majority of stock in the boroughs of Brent, Camden, and Haringey. The other boroughs where Innisfree has homes are; Lewisham, Lambeth, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hertsmere, Islington, Harrow, Enfield, Ealing, Barnet, and Hillingdon.
- 1.3. Our ability to let homes is limited by the number of empty properties we have, and the size, type, and locations of these properties. Many people are in need of appropriately sized homes, more people than there are properties available, therefore it will not be possible to help all applicants.
- 1.4. Innisfree provides housing to four main client groups; general needs (including rent-to-buy), supported, shared and sheltered housing. This Policy does not apply to our Shared Ownership properties or leasehold properties.

## 2. OUR APPROACH

- 2.1. We use this policy to set out how we allocate properties available for letting.
- 2.2 When a property becomes available for letting, a decision is made regarding how to let the home. We consider the following in our decision-making:
- Funding or planning obligations or local letting plans.
  - Nomination agreements with local authorities.
  - Whether the property has been specially adapted.
  - Targets for internal transfers and other groups including move-on from supported housing, referral, and mobility schemes
  - The likely level of demand for and ease of letting a home, and the need to minimise the time a home remains empty.
  - Opportunities to make the best use of our housing stock.
- 3.1 This policy is designed to ensure a consistent approach to allocating properties and any decision making around this.
- 3.1 We intend to let our homes in a sensitive, fair, and transparent way which most effectively suits the housing needs of our local communities, while minimising the time that properties remain empty between each letting.

### 3 POLICY AIMS

3.1 The aims of this policy are to:

- Work with the local authorities and agencies in order to assist them to fulfil their strategic housing function, meeting the housing needs of local communities
- Create sustainable tenancies and balanced communities by making best use of our housing stock
- Treat applicants fairly and equally, providing equal access to services taking into account the diversity of our tenants
- Support new and existing tenants to live in appropriately sized homes, suitable to their needs
- Operate within the requirements of the Homes England, under the standards set by the Regulator for Social Housing, and any other appropriate legislation or regulatory guidance
- Ensure that lettings are undertaken as quickly and efficiently as possible

3.2 This policy does not cover the following tenancy changes:

- The changing of a Starter tenancy to an Assured Tenancy
- The renewal of a fixed term tenancy to a current tenant in the same property
- The transfer of tenancies made by an appropriate Court Order
- The decanting of existing tenants
- The transfer of existing tenants to other Innisfree properties
- Tenants mutually exchanging their tenancies
- Assigning a tenancy to a household member
- Succeeding a tenancy if the tenant has passed away

## 4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 4.1 Innisfree are committed to promoting equal opportunities and valuing diversity.
- 4.2 We recognise that certain groups or individuals are more likely to be discriminated against – this could be on the grounds of protected characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, or religion.
- 4.3 We consider all applications for housing individually – our main criteria to meet is that the applicant should be over the age of 18 and have the right to reside in the UK (whether under humanitarian protection, under immigration rules or through exceptional leave to enter or remain). Our full criteria is outlined in section 11.
- 4.4 To monitor the effectiveness of this Policy we ask applicants and tenants to provide protected characteristics information. This is not a mandatory request and choosing not to provide this information will not affect an offer of a tenancy. We use the data gathered to monitor the effectiveness of this Policy and to ensure that we do not unfairly discriminate against any groups.

## 5. OUR ACCOMMODATION

- 5.1 We have several different types of accommodation, with different qualifying criteria:

### 5.2 **General Needs Housing:**

Innisfree own studios, 1, 2, 3 and 4-bedroom properties across several boroughs. These homes are predominantly offered to Local Authorities to move an individual or family from their Housing Register. We do not accept direct applications for our general needs homes but may consider internal transfers for our existing tenants – in accordance with our Transfer Policy.

### **5.3 Sheltered Housing – Clochar Court:**

Innisfree's aim is to create a scheme that offers a safe, harmonious, and balanced community for older people to live independently. The minimum age for acceptance into sheltered housing is 60 years.

Clochar Court is not appropriate for applicants that require 24-hour nursing care or supervision, or very high support needs such as alcohol dependency, mental health issues, or severe dementia.

To apply for housing at Clochar Court, applicants should contact the Housing team by telephone, email or in writing. Referrals will also be considered from our referral partners. A Housing Officer will make contact with the applicant to assess their application and confirm whether their application will be added to our waiting list.

### **5.4 Intermediate Rent-To-Buy:**

Innisfree have eight flats on Philip Lane in Haringey which are classified as intermediate rent-to-buy. These flats are let on Assured Shorthold tenancies for up to five years, during which time tenants should be saving towards a deposit to buy the property they are renting.

Whilst there is no obligation to purchase during their tenure, Innisfree needs to ensure that others are given an opportunity to use this facility. At the end of five years, the current tenancy may be ended to allow another applicant the rent/purchase opportunity.

### **5.5 Shared Housing:**

Innisfree have several large houses that have been converted to shared accommodation. Applications for our shared housing depend on the individual property arrangements. We currently have shared houses for the following groups:

- Young Irish professionals, aged 18-30
- Older Irish men, aged 45+

We do not consider direct applications for these properties; referrals can be made through one of our referral partners including the London Irish Centre, Irish Elders, SOLACE (Women's Aid), Stonewall Housing, and Brent Irish Advisory Service.

## 5.6 Supported Housing:

Innisfree works with the Clearing House to provide homes for street homeless applicants. Tenancies are generally for two years on an Assured-Shorthold tenancy, with support provided by St Mungos. Any move-on commitments to tenants will be provided by the Clearing House.

## 6. TENANCY TYPES

- 6.1 We let our properties using a range of different tenancy agreements, depending on the circumstances and the property being let. The tenancies that we use include:
- 6.2 **Starter Tenancy** – This tenancy is given to many new Innisfree tenants. The tenancy has an introductory period lasts for 12 months, during which we will monitor any rent arrears, antisocial behaviour, or tenancy management issues. At the end of the 12 months the introductory period may be extended for another 6 months if we have any concerns, ended, or it will be converted into an Assured Tenancy.
- 6.3 **Assured Tenancy** – This type of tenancy is a lifetime tenancy which only ends if you leave, pass away, or are evicted.
- 6.4 **Assured Shorthold Tenancy** – These tenancies are used predominantly in our Shared Houses and Supported Housing schemes. The tenant has similar rights to an Assured Tenant, but Innisfree can end the tenancy by giving notice.
- 6.5 **Licence** – Innisfree predominantly use Licences at our shared accommodation. A Licence allows the tenant to stay at the property while paying rent, but does not give them the same security, tenure, and rights as the above tenancies.

## 7. OUR PRIORITIES

- 7.1 In order to ensure we are allocating vacant properties appropriately; we will consider the allocation of homes in the following priority:

### 1. Decants

Our highest priority need is to find suitable, alternative housing for tenants that have been required to move out of their home while essential works take place.

We aim to make all decanted tenants an offer of temporary accommodation within our housing stock, in an area of their choice – however this may not be possible due to our stock limitations.

Decanted tenants are expected to return to their original home once the works have taken place, however, in exceptional circumstances it may be agreed that the tenant remain in the alternative property and their original tenancy be ended. This process is explained in detail in our Decant Policy.

### 2. Local Authority Nominations

Local authorities advertise vacant Innisfree properties at our request; they will advertise the homes through their choice-based lettings system and will nominate the households that have bid on the property, that they feel meet the priority criteria.

Innisfree consider all nominees against our allocation criteria outlined in section 11 – ensuring that they are in need of housing and that the home will suit their needs.

### 3. Internal transfer applicants

Existing Innisfree tenants that have successfully applied to move from their home as it is no longer suitable to their need, will be added to our internal transfer waiting list. Transfer applications are prioritised through the allocation of points -with a management transfer being the highest priority, as set out in our Transfer Policy.

Transfer applicants will be considered for vacant properties, ensuring the home suits the needs of the tenant and their household.

#### **4. Partner Agency Referrals**

Innisfree work closely with several small specialist agencies to provide support and accommodation for their clients. Referrals for our homes are considered from agencies including the London Irish Centre, Brent Irish Advisory Service, Solace (Women's Aid), and The Traveller Movement.

#### **5. Reciprocal Arrangements**

To assist a tenant or other landlord, we may take reciprocal arrangements to rehouse a tenant in exchange for the other landlord accepting a nomination for a similar sized property.

## **8. LOCAL AUTHORITY AND PARTNER AGENCY NOMINATIONS**

8.1 Local authorities and partner agencies will often provide several nominations per vacant property. When providing these nominations, they will provide personal details of the nominee. This may include:

- The applicants' full details and the details of their household
- Any support or care needs that they have, and whether this affects their housing need
- A history of any rent arrears or benefit fraud
- Any known history, relevant criminal record, or antisocial behaviour

8.2 With these details Innisfree will determine whether the nomination is suitable for the home or if it will have an adverse effect on the balance or mix of the local community.

8.3 Nominations will be considered unless:

- The information provided by the local authority is incorrect or incomplete
- The nominee is under the age of 18
- The household's circumstances have changed since they made their application, and the nomination is no longer suitable
- The home does not meet the needs of the household in terms of size, location, floor level, parking, or accessibility
- The home is adapted, and the applicants do not have those specific support needs
- The nominees have care needs of a level that Innisfree cannot meet, and an appropriate support package is not in place
- The nominee is a former Innisfree tenant, has tenant arrears and is unable to clear these arrears in full
- There is evidence of formal legal action taken against a household member for antisocial behaviour, or they have shown violence towards a staff member
- The nominee has taken part in criminal activity that would mean the nominee would pose an unacceptable risk of re-offending in the area

8.4 Any decision made to accept or refuse an application will consider the housing need of each applicant against the criteria set out in section 11. Written reasons for refusal will be provided to the nominating agency.

## 9. TRANSFERS

9.1 As outlined in our Transfer Policy, Transfer applicants will be considered for a move if the following criteria is met:

- They have lived at their address for at least 12 months
- They are outside of a starter tenancy or introductory period
- They do not have rent arrears at the time of an offer being made
- They are not subject to a Notice of Seeking Possession
- They are not under investigation for antisocial behaviour or tenancy fraud
- They are not in breach of their tenancy terms and conditions
- They have not abused or neglected their current property
- There is a demonstrable need for transfer

## 10. RECIPROCAL NOMINATIONS

10.1 On occasions where we are unable to house a tenant who requires an urgent move due to harassment or violence, we may consider entering a reciprocal arrangement with a Local Authority or another Housing Association. This means that we would ask the Authority or Housing Association to house one of our tenants and in return we would agree to house one of their tenants or applicants.

## 11. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- 11.1 Innisfree seek to ensure that applicants meet the qualifying criteria for the property they are being considered for, an applicant must meet the below:
- Be an adult over the age of 18
  - Have a housing need
  - Be eligible to reside and rent in the United Kingdom at the time of letting
  - Not be serving a custodial sentence
  - Not hold a tenancy elsewhere or own property elsewhere
  - Be able to demonstrate that they can sustain and manage a tenancy, including being able to afford the weekly rent charge
  - Applicants will not be in rent arrears for their current home or owe money for any previous social housing tenancy – applicants may be considered on a case-by-case basis if they are able to prove they have made substantial efforts over a sustained period to clear the debt
  - Not have been previously evicted from an Innisfree property for rent arrears or breach of tenancy terms and conditions
  - Applicants and members of the household will not be perpetrators of serious and/or ongoing nuisance or anti-social behaviour at their current home, or had any legal action as a result of nuisance or anti-social behaviour taken against them including a Notice of Seeking Possession or injunction.
- 11.2 As part of the letting process, all prospective tenants will need to provide verification documents including photographic proof of identity, proof of their right to rent, residency and income.
- 11.3 In cases where nominations are provided by the Local Authority, all appropriate checks to ensure that the household have the Right to Rent in the UK will be carried about by that Local Authority and confirmed by Innisfree Where applicants apply directly to Innisfree, we will ensure that this legal standard is met.
- 11.4 Owner-occupiers are not usually eligible to apply for our general needs properties but may be considered for our Sheltered Accommodation by referral from the Local Authority or Social Care Services, where there is an evidenced need for housing.

11.5 Innisfree must adhere to The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 – the regulations state that ‘Persons Subject to Immigration Control (PSIC) cannot be allocated social housing and are ineligible for housing assistance. A PSIC is defined as someone who requires leave to enter or remain in the UK. Any applicant without permanent leave to remain will need to show staff:

- Their passport, and;
- The Immigration Status Document they were given that states their asylum decision, or;
- A letter from the UK Border Agency or Home Office confirming eligibility, or;
- A copy of the documents they sent off with an application to renew their leave to remain with the receipt from the UK Border Agency.

Innisfree will confirm their Right to Rent using the Government Portal. If the Right to Rent is not live or confirmed at point of letting, the applicant cannot be granted a tenancy and will be referred back to their referring agency.

## 12. PROPERTY SIZING

12.1 Innisfree will ensure that at the time of letting no statutory overcrowding or under occupation is taking place. The principles that we follow are:

- Couples living together will be offered a double bedroom unless there is medical evidence showing need for a spare bedroom
- Disabled applicants requiring a resident or non-resident overnight carer may be offered a property with a spare bedroom providing there is evidence to support this need, and they provide proof of relevant income to afford this
- Single applicants under the age of 35 that are only entitled to the single room rate from April 2019 will be considered for a bedsit or studio property
- Two children of the same sex are expected to share the same bedroom until the eldest reaches the age of 16
- Two children of different sexes are expected to share the same bedroom until the eldest reaches the age of 10

- Parents that have custody of a child for 3.5 days a week or more will be entitled to include the child as a permanent member of their household and will therefore be included when allocating a property. Residence orders will be required as proof of the arrangement.
- Adult children deployed on operation in the Armed Forces will be treated as continuing to live at home

12.2 Properties are allocated in accordance with the Social Housing Room Size Criteria, under which one bedroom is allowed for the following groups:

- Each adult couple
- Any child aged 16 or over
- Two same-sex children under the age of 16
- Two children regardless of sex under the age of 10
- Any other child
- A carer who has a home elsewhere, that uses a spare bedroom on a regular basis as a household member requires overnight care

12.3 The Social Housing Room Size Criteria does not apply to those over state pension credit age or those in shared ownership schemes.

## 13. ADAPTED PROPERTIES

13.1 Where homes have been built, or adapted to be accessible to people with disabilities, we will allocate these to people with similar needs wherever possible to make best use of these homes.

## 14. NEW BUILDS

14.1 In the case of new build properties, to help achieve sustainable and balanced communities, we work in partnership with other Housing Associations and Local Authorities to develop local lettings plans when building new developments.

14.2 We will work with the partnership agencies to ensure any lettings plan reasonably balances the demand for local housing and address any specific issues in the area.

- 14.3 Where a local lettings plan or policy is in place, this will take precedent over our Allocations Policy for that area, scheme, or estate.

## 15. SENSITIVE LETS

- 15.1 In cases where there may be a housing management issue at a property, we may decide to treat lettings there as a sensitive let when requesting a nomination from a Local Authority.
- 15.2 Advertising a property as a sensitive let means that we have the ability to allocate the property to the most appropriate applicant.

## 16. HIGH RISK NOMINATIONS

- 16.1 Innisfree will provide reasonable assistance to local authorities and referral agencies in providing lettings to ex-offenders and any other potentially excluded groups. However, we will exclude such ex-offenders if the supporting information provided indicates that the risk to staff and other tenants is too high.
- 16.2 We expect any nominating Local Authority to provide relevant, recent documentation and risk-related paperwork in accordance with data sharing protocols, to safeguard staff and tenants.
- 16.3 We reserve the right to refuse to house high risk potential applicants where there is a lack of information or support for them. We will not consider high risk nominees for sensitive lets.

## 17. ACCEPTING AND REFUSING APPLICATIONS

- 17.1 Innisfree seek to let our homes responsibly – we aim to support tenants to sustain their tenancies and may refuse a property where an applicant is unable to demonstrate that they can manage the tenure effectively. We will also refuse an application where the applicant needs a level of support that we or a supporting agency cannot provide.

- 17.2 When we receive a referral for an empty property, we will first arrange for a Housing Officer to contact the applicant and complete an Interview and Assessment form. This interview helps staff to understand the applicants housing situation, their needs and the needs of the people living with them, and their financial and residential status – giving us an understanding of how they may manage the potential tenancy.
- 17.3 After completing a successful interview and assessment, the Housing Officer will offer the applicant a viewing of the property. The applicant will be invited to visit the property in person to consider whether it is an appropriate home for themselves and their household members. If the applicant wishes to decline the property, the reasons for this must be recorded and reported back to the nominating party – the Housing Officer would then move onto the next applicant.
- 17.4 The Housing Officer will request supporting documents from the applicant. These documents include, but are not limited to:
- Photo identification for the tenants and all household members
  - Proof of residency if the tenant was not born in the UK
  - Proof of National Insurance Number
  - Proof of income, such as 3 months wage slips, bank statements or benefit award letters
  - Proof of any savings
  - Support letters from medical practitioners, if an applicant or household members has needs to be catered for
- 17.5 After collecting and reviewing the supporting documents, the Housing Officer will decide whether to refuse or offer accommodation to the applicant:
- **Accepting an application:**  
Where the Housing Officer deems it appropriate to offer the applicant accommodation, a formal offer letter will be given to the applicant explaining that they will be granted a tenancy, subject to the verification of their application. Verification is a process completed by the referring Local Authority or Innisfree if a direct let, where the applicant's right to reside and right to rent in the UK are checked.  
  
If the verification is unsuccessful, the offer of accommodation will be withdrawn in writing and the Housing Officer will move on to the next applicant.

If the verification is successful, the Housing Officer will arrange for the applicant to sign up for their new tenancy.

Where an offer of accommodation is made to the successful candidate, they must confirm their acceptance within two working days, or the offer may be withdrawn.

▪ **Refusing an application:**

If the Housing Officer does not receive the relevant supporting documents or determines that the property is not suitable for the needs of the tenant and their household, or feels that they will be unable to manage the tenancy – this decision will be given to the applicant in writing and will be fed back to the nominating party. The Housing Officer would then move on to the next applicant to begin the process again.

## 18. APPEAL PROCESS

- 18.1 Innisfree carry out allocation of all our properties through a weekly meeting. This meeting takes place to ensure that allocations are carried out in a fair and transparent manner, and that we are meeting our nomination arrangements with the local authorities.
- 18.2 If an applicant is unhappy with the decision they have received or the way that their application, selection or offer of accommodation has been handled, they can appeal by contacting the Housing Officer within two working days of receiving their decision.
- 18.3 An applicant can make a complaint through the Complaints Policy if they are dissatisfied with a service received or a service failure by us.

## 19. DATA SHARING

- 19.1 All information will be stored in our Housing Management systems. All case notes, case files, and personal information will be kept confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. We will adhere to the Data Protection Act and comply with General Data Protection Regulation for Sharing Personal Information to ensure that we maintain confidentiality of all parties.
- 19.2 We will share information with third parties where we have an information sharing protocol in place, if there are safeguarding concerns, or we have a duty to do so for the purpose of crime prevention under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (and any other relevant legislation) justify it.

## 20. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

- 20.1 Social housing is a valuable resource and allocations must be made in a fair and transparent way. We are committed to embedding the 2010 Equality Act into our Policies and Procedures. As part of this commitment, staff should facilitate reasonable adjustments and adapt our standard policies and procedures wherever possible.
- 20.2 To make an adjustment means to change work practices to avoid or correct the disadvantage to a person with a disability. This may include:
- Allowing more time than we would usually for someone to provide information that we needed.
  - Providing specialist equipment or additional support such as a sign language interpreter.
- 20.3 The Allocations policy will ensure that all tenants and applicants are treated in a fair and non-discriminatory way.

## 21. REVIEWING THIS POLICY

- 21.1 We will carry out a full review of this policy every 3 years.

21.2 We will keep this policy under ongoing review and update it in accordance with:

- Best practice
- Statutory and legal obligations
- Lessons learned from complaints and practical application

21.3 We will publish our policy on our website



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