



Providing Choice



Addressing Inequalities



Improving Life Opportunities

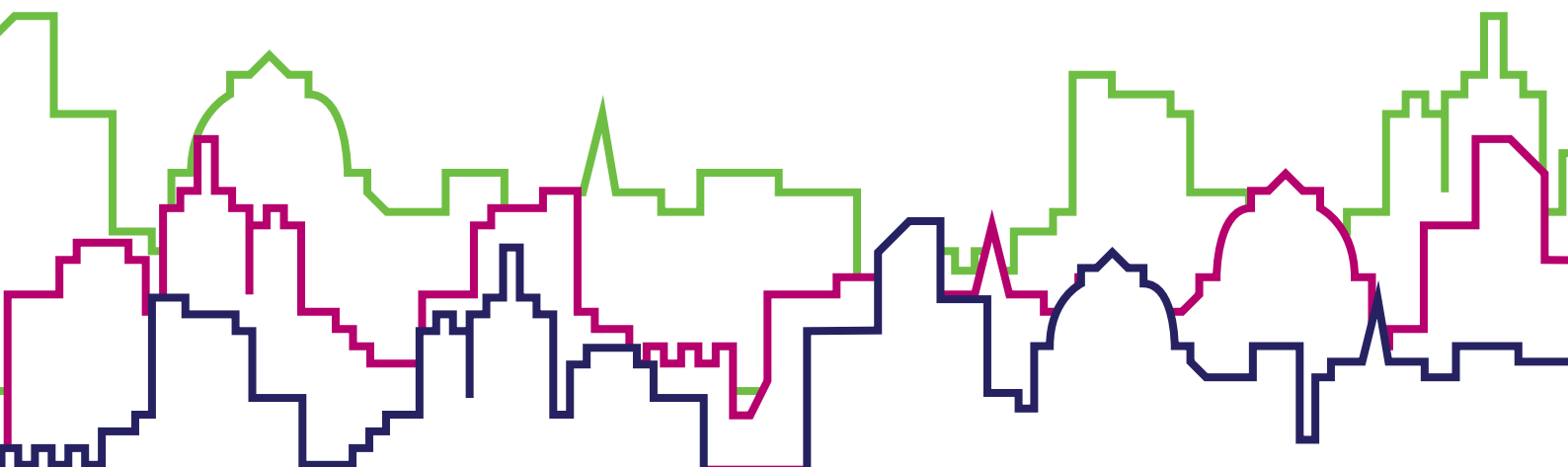


Allocations Policy

2014

Type of document: Policy Statement
Document group: Allocations & Lettings

This policy establishes the approach that Unity Housing Association will take to the allocation of our homes.



1. Purpose & Scope

This policy establishes the approach that Unity Housing Association will take to the allocation of our homes. The policy is intended to give general guidance and must be viewed in the context of the need to maintain a flexible approach to the management and allocation of our properties in order to achieve our strategic objectives.

Unity will develop and keep under review procedures to ensure the practical implementation of this policy. Our procedures will operate to prevent fraudulent allocations through the careful assessment of all applicants and the establishment of suitable internal controls. We will also have regard to the procedures and guidance for the operation of the Leeds Homes Register issued by Leeds City Council.

Unity has begun to build properties within the boundaries of other local authorities and, as such, will have regard to the procedures and guidance for the operation of their Choice Based Lettings schemes.

2. Policy Objectives

Unity is committed to responding to a wide range of housing needs by providing excellent quality affordable homes throughout Leeds. We aim to encourage and promote social inclusion and have a positive impact on the wellbeing of our Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

We aim to allocate our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way, and promote access and choice for applicants by participating in local and regional choice based lettings schemes where appropriate.

Unity will take into account the individual housing needs and aspirations of each applicant and balance this against the need to make the best use of our available housing stock.

We have two overriding objectives when we allocate our homes and these are:

- **To create successful and sustainable communities**
- **To provide homes that meet our customers' needs**

In order to achieve our allocations objectives we will adopt the following approach.

3. We aim to create successful and sustainable communities

We are committed to allocating our homes in ways that will enable neighbourhoods to flourish socially and economically. We want our homes to be places where people are proud to live in. To achieve our aim of creating successful and sustainable communities Unity will adopt the following approach.

3.1 Consultation and partnership

We will liaise and consult with our customers, local authorities and other key stakeholders to understand the housing needs of the communities in the neighbourhoods where we work. The results of this consultation will be used to shape our approach to allocations.

We will co-operate with and support our local authority partners to fulfil their duties in meeting housing need.

3.2 Choice Based Lettings

We will use a lettings system that allows choice, considers individual needs and ensures we treat everyone as fairly as possible. In Leeds we are a partner in the Leeds Homes Register (LHR) which is a choice based lettings scheme set up to make applying for housing in Leeds easier for applicants.

When a vacancy arises it will usually be advertised as a choice based letting through the LHR. By registering with the LHR an applicant will automatically be considered by Unity, unless they specifically request otherwise.

Applications made by staff and their family members:

Employees, former employees, contractors, board and/or committee members and any of their close relatives can bid for vacant properties advertised by Unity on the Leeds Homes Register. Any decision to allocate a property to this category of applicant will be subject to the criteria set out in this policy

and approval by the (Operations Director/Board). We will not accept a direct application from this category of applicant.

We will adopt the criteria operated by the LHR to prioritise applicants and assess them for housing with Unity. This criterion is set out in **Appendix A**.

To ensure that the allocation of our homes makes the best use of our properties and supports a balanced and sustainable community we may not offer properties to the applicant with the highest priority through the LHR.

In addition where an applicant successfully bids for a home through the LHR and where that household may be deemed to be under occupying the property on the basis of the DWP property size guidance and they are in receipt of welfare benefits we may exclude the applicant **where we believe that they may not have the means to pay the rent** (see part 5.5 for exclusions and Appendix B for the DWP property size guidance).

3.3 Allocations outside choice based lettings

In certain circumstances Unity may not advertise a vacancy through the Leeds Homes Register. There are a number of circumstances where this may be considered appropriate and this could include:

Management lettings -

- To provide accommodation either temporary or permanent for an existing tenant whose home is effected by an emergency or requires major repairs. This is known as decanting
- To provide urgent rehousing for witness protection or to respond to serious anti social behaviour or domestic abuse where the resident is at serious risk by remaining in their current home and needs an immediate move
- To provide housing for a referral from a partner agency.

Disposal or change of use –

- To release a property for alternative use such as supported housing
- To enable a property to be sold or redeveloped.

Local lettings plans -

In some areas where Unity has properties we may chose to apply local lettings policies. If we adopt a local lettings plan specific rules will apply to those homes covered by the plan. We will provide applicants with information on the rules which apply and will consult with our customers and partners before a local lettings plan is agreed.

Hard to let properties -

Occasionally Unity has vacancies in properties which are considered low demand. In order to ensure that we are making the best use of our stock these properties may be allocated to applicants considered to be low priority.

Where we allocate our homes outside the Leeds Homes Register we will adopt the priorities set out in **Appendix B**.



4. We will provide homes that meet our customers' needs

We recognise that being able to live in a high quality home that is safe and well maintained is essential if people are to achieve their personal aspirations. We are committed to allocating homes in the best possible condition and to meeting the needs of customers both now and in the future. To achieve our aim of providing homes that meet our customers' needs Unity will adopt the following approach.

4.1 Re-let conditions

All our homes will be let in a condition that meets our agreed Lettable Standards.

4.2 Security of tenure

We will offer the most suitable form of tenancy compatible with the type of accommodation and the needs of the applicant. We will ensure that we make the best use of our properties. Our approach to security of tenure is set out in our Tenancy Policy.

4.3 Support

Unity is committed to working closely with tenants to may need assistance to sustain their tenancies. The circumstances of the household including age, disability or illness will be taken into account when securing appropriate support services from our partner agencies.

4.4 Transfers

As the circumstances of existing Unity tenants change they may need to apply for a transfer to accommodation which is more suited to their needs. We will normally deal with all transfers through the Leeds Homes Register. This ensures that tenants have more choice and the best possible chance of obtaining a move by having access to vacancies advertised by all participating landlords.

Unity may maintain a limited waiting list for existing tenants who have a specific reason for wanting to move or who are

required to move by us and may not be able to secure a new home quickly through the LHR. We will only consider a direct allocation to an existing tenant based on the criteria set out in Appendix B. This criterion will apply to existing tenants whether they apply through the Leeds Homes Register or directly to Unity.

Specific priority may be given to tenants wishing to move to a home with fewer bedrooms where this would benefit their financial situation.

Subject to the exclusions set out in paragraph 5, for an existing Unity tenant to be eligible for a transfer to another Unity home they need to be:

- Registered on an existing choice based lettings scheme
- Have been a tenant for at least 12 months
- Have no rent arrears
- Have no outstanding repairs that they are responsible for
- Have no unresolved breaches of their tenancy



4.5 Mobility

We will support our tenants to gain access to opportunities to exchange their tenancies through mutual exchange services. We will promote and publicise mutual exchange opportunities and the availability of any national mobility scheme.

5. Exclusions and suspended applicants

To create successful and sustainable communities and to ensure that we provide homes that meet our customers' needs there may be times when we need to exclude or suspend an application for housing. This may apply whether the applicant bids for a property through the Leeds Homes Register or applies directly to Unity for a home. Applicants will be excluded or suspended in the following circumstances:

5.1 Applicants with arrears or other debts

Where an applicant owes monies to ourselves or another landlord we will suspend their application. Applicants in these circumstances will only be considered if there are exceptional circumstances. When we determine whether to suspend an application we will consider the following:

- Age of the debt
- The reason for the debt – for example where this is caused by a shortfall in housing benefit resulting from under occupation
- Existing repayment arrangements
- Continuous payments to reduce the debt
- The amount outstanding

Where a current court order is in place or the applicant has been previously evicted for rent arrears this will preclude any offer of housing.

5.2 Applicants with a history of unacceptable behaviour

We will exclude applicants where we consider that their previous or current behaviour or the behaviour of members of their household is unacceptable and is serious enough to make them unsuitable as a tenant. We will also exclude those applicants that we consider pose a threat to the community and those who have persistently breached their conditions of tenancy with Unity or another landlord.

5.3 Applicants who have not looked after their property

We will exclude or suspend applicants who have caused damage or failed to maintain their current or previous home in a reasonable condition. Where we suspend an application we will make it clear what work needs to be done before we will lift the suspension.

5.4 Applicants who provide inadequate or false information

We will exclude applicants who do not respond to requests for further information or fail to provide the information that we have requested.

Unity will act to detect and prevent tenancy fraud and exclude applications where we believe that information supplied by an applicant is incomplete, false, deliberately withheld or misrepresents the applicants housing circumstances. Where we believe that an applicant has fraudulently secured a tenancy we will take steps to recover possession of the tenant's home.

We will also exclude applicants who have deliberately altered their circumstances in order to improve their prospects of being allocated a home or applicants where we believe that they have secure and suitable accommodation elsewhere available for their use.

5.5 Housing applicants who would be inappropriately housed by Unity

In certain circumstances and where Unity believes that it would not be possible for a tenant to sustain their tenancy we may exclude or suspend an application for housing. Examples of the circumstances where this may occur include:

- Households who may not have the means to pay the rent (for example persons from abroad who do not qualify for public funds or applicants on welfare benefits who may under occupy a property and cannot demonstrate the means to pay any shortfall in housing benefit)
- Applicants with support needs who do not have a support plan or have refused such help
- Applicants with serious mental health problems that result in them being unable to sustain a tenancy even with assistance from specialist support agencies.

5.6 Refusal of an offer of accommodation

We may exclude or suspend an application for housing where the applicant has refused a reasonable offer of accommodation.

There may be other reasons why Unity may wish to exclude an applicant. In all cases we will consider applications individually and if we decide that an applicant is excluded or suspended this will usually be for a period of no longer than 2 years. When an applicant is excluded or suspended they will be notified in writing of the decision, the reasons for it and the period of time that they are excluded from reapplying or suspended from receiving an offer of a home.

6. Service standards

We aim to provide high quality services to our customers that are effective and culturally sensitive. When we deliver our allocations service we will:

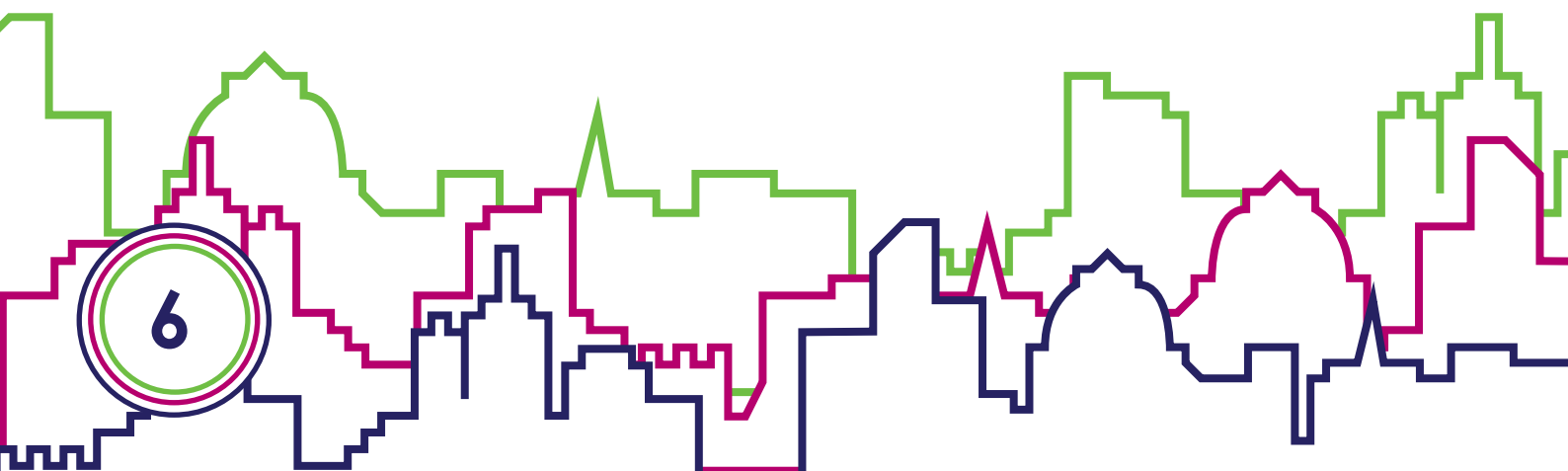
- Provide customers and applicants with clear and concise information about our allocations service
- Work with other agencies to identify and meet applicants support needs including providing assistance to access internet based allocations and mobility schemes
- Promote access to mutual exchange services and transfer opportunities

- Support customers to move to smaller homes.
- Provide advice and help on finding alternative housing to customers that we are unable to assist
- Write to customers whose applications are suspended or refused and explain the reasons why
- Inform applicants of their prospects of being rehoused by Unity
- Respond to enquiries from applicants within 10 days
- Deal with complaints about our allocations service or decisions to exclude or suspend housing applicants at the first point of contact or through our formal complaints procedure

7. Legislation and regulation

When we allocate our homes we shall have regard to all relevant legislation, regulation and good practice. In particular we will have regard to the following regulatory requirements which have been put in place by the Social Housing Regulator:

- **The Economic Standard** – this policy contributes towards achieving the **Value for Money Standard** by:
 - Ensuring that we make the best use of our resources and this includes our housing stock
- **The Consumer Standards** – this policy contributes towards achieving the Tenancy Standard which requires Unity to let our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. The Tenancy Standard requires that we take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants and demonstrate how our lettings:
 - make the best use of available housing
 - are compatible with the purpose of the housing
 - contribute to the local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities



The Tenancy Standard also requires Unity to enable our tenants to gain access to opportunities to exchange their tenancy with that of another tenant by way of internet-based mutual exchange services.

Unity will be mindful of the Prevent Duty for England and Wales. Where applicable Unity will work in partnership with all stakeholders to identify, report and liaise on any concerns that are witnessed or raised during our day to day work with the community and customers.

This Allocations Policy statement satisfies the association's regulatory and statutory requirements.

8. Complaints

Unity will seek to resolve any complaint from customers over the operation of this policy at the first point of contact. If this cannot be done complaints from applicants will be dealt with through our formal complaints procedure.

9. Responsibility

9.1 Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation rests with the Housing Services Manager. The Housing Manager will ensure that staff receive the appropriate training and support to effectively achieve the objectives of this policy.

9.2 The Housing Services Manager has discretion under this policy to authorise offers to applicants regardless of their priority, not to make an offer to an applicant where it would be incompatible with the objectives of this policy and to exclude or suspend applications. The Housing Manager also has discretion to make decisions on rehousing where an applicant's housing needs are not covered by this policy or to waive this policy in exceptional circumstances.

9.3 From time to time it may be necessary to develop specific Action Plans and strategies to support the full implementation of this policy. Responsibility for the delivery of these action

plans and strategies will be allocated to the most appropriate member of staff.

10. Monitoring & Performance

10.1 Monitoring of the implementation of this policy will be the responsibility of the Board.

10.2 Unity will set performance targets to measure the success of our allocations service. Progress against these targets will be reported to the Board and Executive Team.

10.3 This Policy relates to the current Business Plan priorities 2.1 and 2.3 under objective 2 of the Business Plan.

11. Equality & Diversity

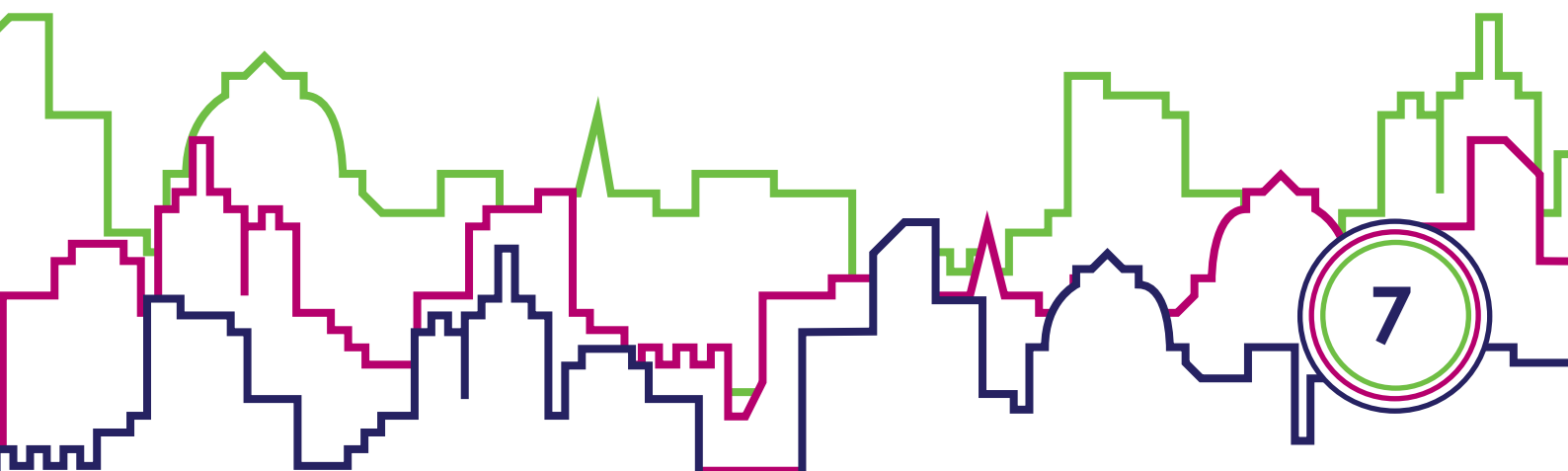
11.1 We will ensure that there is fair and equal access to our allocations service. We will have regard to our Equality and Diversity Policy and provide information about our allocations service in key community languages when requested and in formats that aid understanding by vulnerable or disabled customers.

11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in respect of this policy on 03/04/14. The EIA concluded that this policy is not directly or indirectly discriminatory.

12. Associated Documents

This Allocations Policy is not intended to operate in isolation and this policy statement should be considered alongside the following documents:

- Lettable Standards
- Domestic abuse policy and procedure
- Tenancy policy
- Complaints policy and procedure
- Equality and diversity policy



13. Policy review summary

Policy title	Allocations Policy
Policy group	Allocations & Lettings
Regulatory requirements	Consumer Standard - Tenancy Standard
Date created	March 2014
Person responsible	Housing Manager
Version	2.0
Customer consultation arrangements	Scrutiny Panel
Approved by	Senior Management Team on: Sept 2015
Authorised by	Board on: Nov 2015
Review period	3 years unless required sooner
Review committee	Board
Review period	June 2015

13. Document management

Version	Amended	Amendments
1.	April 2014	Original document. Replaces and updates current allocations and lettings policy statements.
2.	June 2015	Strengthens commitment to prevent fraudulent allocations. Eligibility of staff and family members for housing.

Appendix A - Leeds Homes Register Priority Need Bands

Band A: this band consists of customers requiring urgent rehousing where the council has a legal duty to consider them for accommodation.

1. Homeless

Where Leeds City Council has accepted a duty in accordance with Housing Act 1996, Part 7 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002

Examples:

- Statutorily homeless customers, i.e. eligible, homeless, in priority need, unintentionally homeless and with a local connection to Leeds.

2. Medical

Where there is an urgent need for rehousing and the customer or household member's medical condition is being severely affected or exacerbated by the property they reside in and where the customer:

- is unable to return home from hospital because the property does not meet their medical needs (blocking a hospital bed) and where a move to temporary accommodation would be inappropriate
- requires urgent rehousing to prevent an admission to hospital, residential care or nursing home
- is unable to access any of the facilities in their current property
- has extreme difficulty mobilising within their current property
- has extreme difficulty accessing the property owing to steps or slopes leading to doorways
- requires an adapted property to meet their needs and their current home cannot be adapted

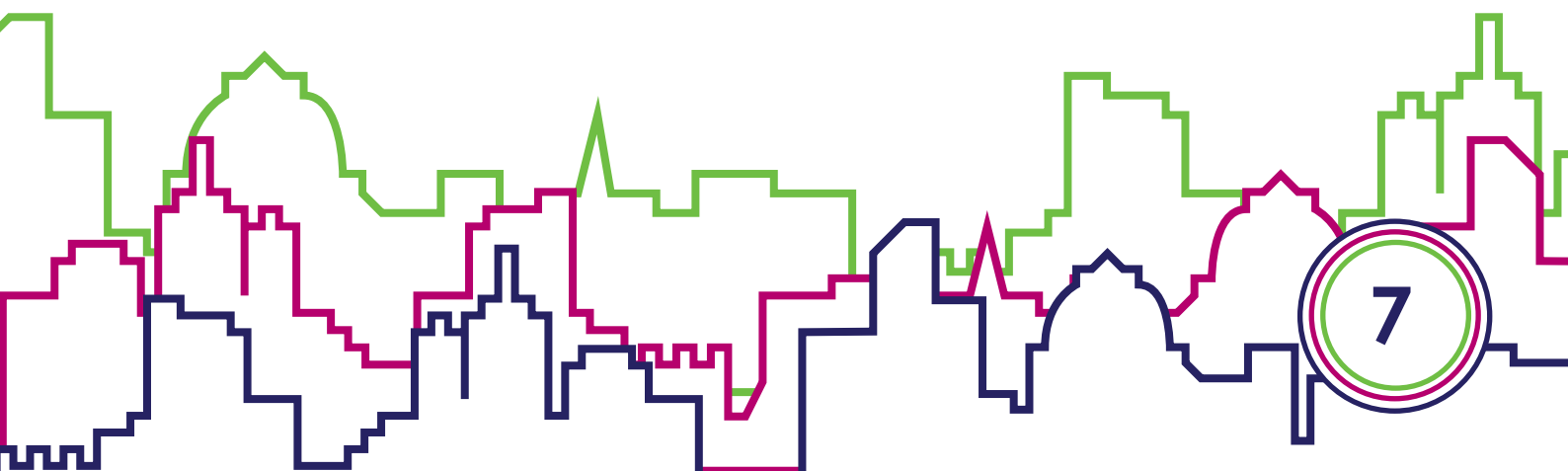
- requires extra facilities on health grounds, (for example, a bedroom or bathroom) which cannot be provided in their current home
- urgently requires sheltered housing facilities because of their medical history, vulnerability, being at risk in their current property or in urgent need of sheltered housing and requires housing related support (ie. warden service)
- urgently requires suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability which he or she, or a member of their household, has sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces

3. Housing Conditions

Where a customer, or their household, needs to move urgently due to the condition of their property.

Examples:

- customers whose property has been approved for clearance by a Environment and Neighbourhoods decision panel or Council Executive
- Board decision
- on referral from the council's Environmental Health Service where major works are required to a customer's property making it uninhabitable, eg private rented properties where there is no alternative measure to render the property habitable
- households assessed as being statutorily overcrowded
- households with dependent children who are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms according to Leeds City Council's bedroom standard.



4. Additional needs: general

Where a customer, or member of their household, needs to move urgently on welfare or hardship grounds which do not fall into the other streams.

Examples:

- customers requiring urgent rehousing due to their care or support needs where medical priority is not applicable but there is a demonstrable need to move eg to give or receive support, or to access specialised medical facilities
- customers requiring urgent rehousing due to harassment, including racial, sexual or homophobic harassment or abuse, or other hate crimes
- where an urgent need to move is agreed in conjunction with police or social services, eg to assist in the delivery of a care plan, witness protection, safeguarding procedures, or as a result of a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference or Leeds Area Hate Crime Focus Group
- customers under occupying social housing in Leeds in their current home where the move will achieve best use of council stock
- customers living in an adapted property in social housing in Leeds which they do not require where the move will achieve best use of council stock
- customers with an urgent need to move from a Leeds Supporting People funded 'tier 1' accommodation-based project
- Leeds City Council or Education Leeds service employees and service occupants required to move from tied accommodation, for example, due to retirement.

5. Additional needs: children

Where a move is urgently required because of the needs of a child in the household, on welfare or hardship grounds which do not fall into the other streams. For example:

- Leeds City Council corporate parent duty eg care leavers
- to facilitate fostering or adoption arrangements on referral from Children and Young People's Social Care.

Band B: this band consists of those customers in non-urgent need whom the council has a legal duty to consider for rehousing

1. Homeless

All categories of homeless people who are not statutorily homeless.

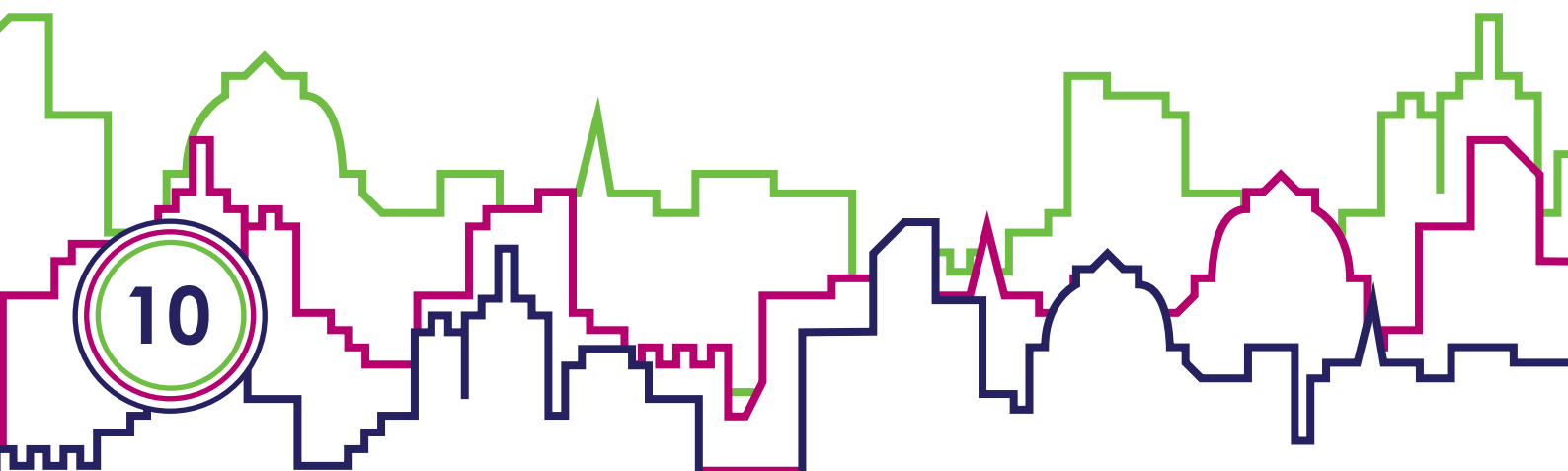
- not in priority need
- intentionally homeless, or
- with no local connection

2. Medical

Where there is a non-urgent need for rehousing and the customer or household member is experiencing difficulties coping in the property they reside in.

Where the customer:

- has difficulty negotiating stairs in the property
- has some difficulty accessing the property owing to steps or slopes leading to doorways
- needs to move because the property is beginning to have a detrimental affect on their physical or mental well-being which could lead to a deterioration in their medical conditions.
- requires the facilities of sheltered housing on age or individual needs for housing related support
- needs improved heating which cannot be secured in the current property on medical grounds.



3. Housing Conditions

Where a customer, or their household, needs to move due to the condition of their property.

Examples:

- households with dependent children who are overcrowded by one bedroom according to Leeds City Council's bedroom standard
- other households who are overcrowded by two bedrooms according to Leeds City Council's bedroom standard
- customers lacking essential services, for example, no inside WC, no cold running water, or no utility connections to heat the house
- customers sharing facilities

4. Additional needs: general

Where a customer, or member of their household, needs to move on welfare or hardship grounds which do not fall into the other streams.

Examples:

- customers requiring rehousing to recover from the effects or threats of violence or physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- where medical priority is not applicable but there is a demonstrable need to move eg to give or receive support, or to access specialised medical facilities
- customers who need to move to take-up particular employment or training opportunities
- where a non-urgent need to move is agreed by Housing in conjunction with police or social services, eg to assist in the delivery of a care plan

- customers with a non-urgent need to move from a Leeds Supporting People funded 'tier 2' accommodation-based project.

5. Additional needs: children

Where a customer needs to move because of the needs of a child in the household on welfare or hardship grounds which do not fall into the other streams.

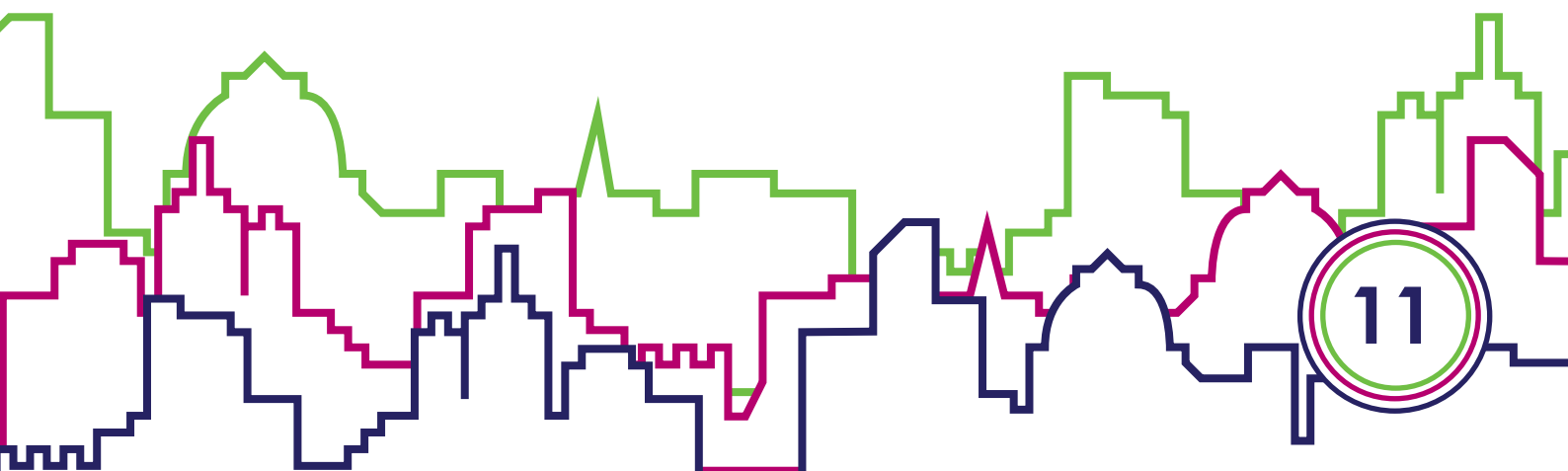
6. Reduced preference

Customers in Band A or Band B where preference is reduced under section 4.3.1 will be considered for offers after other customers in preference bands.

Band C: This band consists of all other customers.

Examples:

- with no assessed housing need
- whose priority award (Band A or Band B) has expired whose priority has been removed after they refused a reasonable offer of accommodation
- who cannot demonstrate a local connection to Leeds (the exception will be homeless customers without a local connection who will be placed in Band B)



Appendix B – Allocations criteria for internal applications for housing (transfers)



At present Unity will only consider direct allocations to existing customers in the following circumstances.

Band A: This band consists of existing Unity customers whose homes require major repairs, to make best use of our stock or to protect a tenant's safety.

A1 Decant - temporary

A2 Decant - permanent

A3 Best use of stock

A4 Management transfer

Band B: This band consists of existing Unity customers who may have need to downsize for financial or other reasons.

B1 Under occupation by 2 bedrooms or more – financial hardship

B2 Under occupation by 1 bedrooms or more – financial hardship

B3 Under occupation – releasing a larger home

Band C: This band would consist of all other existing Unity customers who apply for a transfer through the Leeds Homes Register and do not fall within either Band A or Band B.

Eligibility and bedroom size

Where a household is in receipt of welfare benefits Unity will normally only make direct offers to existing tenants of properties that they will not under occupy based on the DWP property size guidance, unless they are able to demonstrate the means to pay any shortfall in housing benefit. The DWP property size guidance is set out below:

Household	DWP property size criteria
Adult couple (married or unmarried)	One bedroom to share
Single person (over 16)	One bedroom per person
Two children, of the same sex, aged under 16	One bedroom to share
Two children of different sexes, aged under 10	One bedroom to share

